

## Flu vaccines prevent absenteeism

According to the most recent figures, the flu season costs the South African economy in excess of R2 billion annually, with 14.08% of total sick absenteeism incidents in corporate South Africa due to the influenza virus. Vaccinating the workforce not only invests in employees' health but also adds to the bottom line.



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"The workplace is an ideal breeding ground for the flu virus, especially in an office environment where people work in close proximity to each other," explains Dr Jacques Snyman, MD of Integrated Care Solutions at Agility, owners of the Zurreal4employers programme. Cramped areas within buildings, where there is a lack of proper ventilation such as lifts, meeting rooms or coffee areas are also problem zones. In addition, unproductive 'presenteeism' within the workforce (i.e. when an employee reports to work but is unproductive due to flu symptoms) is equally costly to a company and the risks of infecting colleagues are high.

In order to combat this worrying trend, Dr Snyman suggests that businesses should seriously consider implementing an annual flu vaccination programme within the workplace. "An in-house flu vaccination programme administered to a company's workforce at the start of the flu season has been proven to be profitable and protect the business environment.

Companies that have adopted an annual flu vaccination programme manage to maintain productivity levels during the winter season and effectively stop flu transmission among employees, their families and customers. They also reported lower rates of absenteeism and reduced medical costs.

"Each year, new vaccination formulations are developed based on the latest influenza strains. The vaccination consists of chemically inactivated virus, which enables the body to get to know and store the 'shape' of the infection so that when you are exposed to the actual virus, the body is armed to fight it. The flu vaccine should therefore be administered every year before the end of May." The vaccine is effective after 10-14 days and the flu season typically starts around May so it is important that the vaccine is administered in time.

"The old adage, 'prevention is better than cure', is undoubtedly true and vaccinating your workforce against the flu virus is the best pre-emptive measure a company can take to protect its bottom line," he concludes.

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