



Senate Bill 1503 – Influenza Prevention and Education Act

The Oregon Nurses Association believes that all nurses and other health care workers should be vaccinated against seasonal influenza. Vaccination is a key method of protecting health care workers from influenza and plays a key role in preventing the spread of influenza among patients and the public.

Background

Public concern during recent flu seasons and the previous threat of an H1N1 pandemic have caused policy makers to focus on programs to protect Oregonians. Individual health care facilities have implemented a variety of procedures and policies related to influenza vaccinations for health care workers that have achieved varying degrees of success; these policies have had a range of implications for employees. As Oregon's largest group of health care professionals, nurses have seen and experienced the best and worst of this piecemeal approach to vaccinations, and are striving to propose an evidence-based, common sense solution that protects health care workers and the patients they serve.

We believe that nurses and other health care workers should receive the influenza vaccination. We also believe that employees have a right to make an educated decision to decline the vaccination, that vaccination status should be treated as a confidential health record, and that it should not be used as a condition of employment. A comprehensive effort to improve education about the vaccine, and accessibility of the vaccine, combined with a standardized declination form would not only improve the influenza vaccination rate among health care workers, but will also help the state collect the data it needs to further develop strategies for improving vaccination rates. This strategy is a commonsense approach that will protect health care workers and the patients they serve.

SB 1503

SB 1503 takes a proven approach that we've seen work in health care facilities, a strong education campaign coupled with a declination form – and implements this approach statewide. It defines health care facilities and health care workers as broadly as possible to achieve the greatest benefit. Additionally, it protects an individual's vaccination status as a private health record, the same as the patients they serve. Health care facilities' vaccination data, including rates and reasons for declination, would be collected by the state to help inform future policy decisions.

SB 1503 is a step in the right direction towards raising vaccination rates for all health care workers. It's based on education and not on intimidation and shame tactics that we've seen unfairly implemented in Oregon. It will provide policy makers with the best data available to gauge success and guide ongoing education. Oregonians deserve an organized and effective strategy for protecting the health of patients and health care workers.

For More Information:

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