

## Working with flu-like illness common among health professionals

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- Chiu S, et al. *Am J Infect Control*.2017;45:1254-1258, <http://bit.ly/2kaQ4HR>.

More than 40% of health care professionals with an influenza-like illness (ILI) said they continued to work, according to a national, nonprobability survey conducted during the 2014-'15 flu season.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that health care professionals who have an ILI stay home from work until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours. Previous studies, however, have shown that many clinicians work while ill.



Because those studies focused on specific occupations or work settings, researchers sought to describe how common working with an ILI is among various professions and settings.

They analyzed data from a CDC survey of 1,914 physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, pharmacists, aides and other health care personnel in hospitals, physician offices, long-term care facilities and other clinical settings. Participants were asked if they had an ILI defined as fever and sore throat or cough during the 2014-'15 flu season. If so, they reported whether they worked while ill and why.

Results showed that 414 respondents (22%) reported that they had an ILI. About 41% said they worked while sick for a median of three days. Pharmacists (67%) and physicians (63%) were most likely to work while ill, and hospital workers (49%) reported working while sick more frequently than those in other settings.

The most common reasons respondents gave for working with an ILI were they didn't feel bad enough to miss work, they didn't think they were contagious and they couldn't find someone to cover for them.

The authors offered several suggestions to ensure health care professionals stay home when they are sick, including reminding them that influenza is contagious for up to a week after symptoms begin and changing norms that they should work unless they have severe symptoms.

"We recommend all health care facilities take steps to support and encourage their staff to not work while they are sick," lead author Sophia Chiu, M.D., M.P.H., said in a news release.

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