

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6486

As of February 1, 2010

Title: An act relating to vaccination of health care workers.

Brief Description: Requiring hospitals to adopt policies concerning vaccination of health care workers.

Sponsors: Senators Murray, Becker and Shin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/01/10.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Edith Rice (786-7444)

Background: Seasonal influenza or the flu can cause mild to severe illness and can lead to serious illness or death. Every year approximately 36,000 people die from the flu in the United States and over 200,000 people are hospitalized. Influenza infects the nose, throat, windpipe and lungs. High fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, and congestion are all typical symptoms. Older people, young children and people with certain health conditions (such as diabetes, heart disease, or asthma) are at high risk for serious complications from the flu. The flu is spread from person to person by coughing and sneezing.

Recommended precautions to prevent the spread of the flu are: get vaccinated, cover coughs and sneezes, wash hands frequently, and avoid contact with others if you are sick.

According to the Centers for Disease Control report on influenza vaccination of health care personnel, influenza outbreaks in hospitals and long-term care facilities have been associated with low vaccination rates among health care professionals. In numerous studies it has been shown that there is a significant relationship between vaccination rates among health care professionals and the rate of hospital acquired influenza.

Summary of Bill: Hospitals are required to adopt a policy to provide free influenza vaccinations to their health care workers. Training regarding the influenza vaccine must be provided to health care workers who indicate they will decline vaccination. Health care workers are required to annually provide either proof of immunization for influenza or a signed declination citing medical, religious, or philosophical objections. During influenza

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

season health care workers who are unvaccinated must wear a surgical mask when working with patients or take other protective measures as determined by the hospital. Health care workers include hospital employees, independent contractors, licensee, or others who deliver health care services.

Hospitals must report vaccination rates for health care workers to the Department of Health (DOH) annually. The Secretary of DOH can suspend policy requirements if there is a shortage of vaccine. Individual hospitals may adopt stricter policies. Health care workers are not required to be vaccinated against influenza.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Three out of ten health care workers are not vaccinated. Better vaccination rates among health care workers would prevent transmission to patients. The simplest way to prevent infection is to vaccinate health care workers. The flu is easily spread. When ill, 60 percent of health care workers still come to work. Although we support the bill we have some suggested amendments.

CON: We support vaccination; however, this bill is punitive in nature. We would get more cooperation if vaccination wasn't mandatory. This bill is not the answer. This is not a comprehensive approach; it doesn't prevent hospitals from requiring vaccination, and we are concerned about lack of bargaining.

OTHER: We need to follow CDC recommendations. The first line of defense is effective personal protective equipment.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Murray, prime sponsor; Will Shelton, Swedish Medical Center; Dr. Tim Dellit, Harborview Medical Center; Lisa Thatcher, Washington State Hospital Association.

CON: Chris Barton, SEIU; Anne Tan Piazza, Washington State Nurses Association.

OTHER: Sharon Ness, UFCW Washington State Council.