Joint Commission Resources (JCR) announces the results of its third annual Flu Vaccination Challenge, a national program to increase flu vaccination rates among healthcare workers.

Participating healthcare organizations (n=826) reached an 80 percent flu vaccination average among staff during the 2010-2011 flu season, which is 16 percent higher than the national average among healthcare workers of nearly 64 percent. Since 2008, the Flu Vaccination Challenge has helped healthcare organizations to steadily raise staff vaccination rates for flu. With the upcoming 2011-2012 Flu Vaccination Challenge, JCR aims to continue increasing flu vaccination rates among healthcare workers, challenging organizations to achieve at least a 75 percent flu vaccination rate among staff this flu season.

"We commend the thousands of organizations that have participated in the Flu Vaccination Challenge and raised their vaccination rates over the last three years," says William Schaffner, MD, chairman of the Department of Preventive Medicine and professor of infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. "Flu vaccination is an annual need, and the challenge helps healthcare organizations reinforce the importance of vaccination with staff."

Flu vaccination of healthcare workers is important not only to help protect themselves but also to reduce the likelihood that patients or the individuals served will be exposed to the flu. Studies have demonstrated that healthcare workers can be a potential source of flu infection. Both the Joint Commission and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognize the importance of flu vaccination for healthcare workers and provide healthcare organizations with guidance for staff vaccination.

"An 80 percent flu vaccination average among staff at organizations participating in the most recent Flu Vaccination Challenge represents excellent progress," says Tom Talbot, MD, MPH, chief hospital epidemiologist and associate professor of infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and JCR consultant. "It is crucial that healthcare workers receive their flu vaccination every year to avoid putting themselves, their colleagues and their patients at risk."

Additional Results from the 2010-2011 Flu Vaccination Challenge

For the 2010-2011 flu season, JCR challenged healthcare organizations across the country to achieve seasonal flu vaccination rates of 75, 85 or 95 percent among their staff to attain a Bronze, Silver or Gold Recognition Award, respectively. Of the organizations that submitted data (n=826), two-thirds (66 percent) met the challenge by achieving 75
percent or higher seasonal flu vaccination among their staff. Seventeen percent achieved a Gold vaccination level, 22 percent achieved a Silver vaccination level and 27 percent achieved a Bronze vaccination level. With help from the Flu Vaccination Challenge, approximately 780,000 health care workers were vaccinated against the seasonal flu.

Announcing the 2011-2012 Flu Vaccination Challenge

The 2011-2012 Flu Vaccination Challenge begins today and will continue through spring 2012. Now entering its fourth year, JCR continues to challenge health care organizations to achieve a 75, 85 or 95 percent flu vaccination rate among staff during the upcoming flu season. JCR will recognize organizations that "meet" the challenge with a Bronze, Silver or Gold Recognition Award for their dedication to helping to keep their staff and patients healthy by vaccinating against the flu. To participate in this year's challenge and to find additional resources, health care organizations should visit FluVaccinationChallenge.com.

About the Flu

The flu is a contagious and potentially deadly infection. Flu viruses are mainly spread from person to person via droplets from coughing or sneezing. Transmission also may occur through direct or indirect contact, such as when touching something already laden with the flu virus, then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. Every year in the United States, between 5 percent and 20 percent of the population may become infected with the flu. According to the CDC, on average, more than 200,000 people in the United States are hospitalized each year for respiratory and heart illnesses associated with seasonal flu infections. Additionally, over a period of 30 years, between 1976 and 2006, estimates of flu-associated deaths in the United States ranged from a low of approximately 3,000 to a high of approximately 49,000 people.

According to the CDC, annual flu vaccination is the most effective method for preventing flu virus infection and its complications. The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends annual flu vaccination for all individuals 6 months of age and older. While flu vaccination benefits all age groups, certain people have a higher risk for flu complications, such as individuals 50 years of age and older and people with chronic medical conditions. It is important that these people and those in close contact with them – including all healthcare personnel – continue to be a primary focus for vaccination efforts.