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EXCELA HEALTH CELEBRATING COMPLIANCE WITH FLU PREVENTION PROGRAM; INOCULATIONS, MASKS EFFECTIVE PATIENT SAFETY TOOLS

GREENSBURG, PA, April 3, 2014 ... Excela Health continues to set the pace for flu prevention among health care workers in western Pennsylvania with its highly successful safety measures to protect patients and control the spread of this highly communicable illness. Those measures include a two-pronged approach – inoculations and masks for those not receiving the vaccine.

Excela Health is celebrating the widespread compliance among employees and medical staff – reaching a 93 percent participation rate during the 2013 flu season - and maintaining a leading role in the Healthy People 2020 initiative of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to increase immunization rates and reduce preventable infectious diseases.

Over the course of a flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) studies samples of flu viruses circulating during that season to evaluate how much similarity there is between viruses used to make the vaccine and circulating viruses. The most recent data indicates most (99.9%) of the flu viruses that have been analyzed at CDC are like the viruses included in the 2013-2014 flu vaccine. The match between the vaccine virus and circulating viruses is one factor that impacts how well the vaccine works.

“The correlation between Excela’s inoculation rate and the vaccine’s effectiveness is an important one,” said Carol Fox, MD, Excela Health’s Chief Medical Officer. “People in the United States continue to get diseases that are vaccine preventable. Viral hepatitis, influenza, and pneumonia remain among the leading causes of illness and death and account for substantial spending on the related consequences of infection. The vigilance of Excela Health’s employees and physicians is part of our broader commitment to population health.”

According to Latrobe pediatrician David Wyzomierski, MD, who has championed Excela Health’s flu prevention efforts, widespread immunization helps to build up “herd immunity.” That’s important to improving our community’s susceptibility to infection in future years.

“The benefit of flu vaccination is four-fold,” said Dr. Wyzomierski. “The vaccine protects those who receive it from getting the flu, which as we know can last five to seven days with moderate to

severe symptoms. It protects people who have health risks, such as the elderly, or those with chronic medical conditions. It decreases hospital admissions, which saves on health care costs globally, and locally, it benefits our community when health care workers are healthy, and not needing time off to recover from something that can be avoided. That's a quadruple win."

National best practices for health care worker inoculation show rates as high as 98 percent at Virginia Mason, where a mandatory vaccination program has been in effect since 2005. The Department of Health and Joint Commission are also driving compliance as is the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, by proposing that immunization rates of health care workers be part of future value based performance metrics.

"Education is key to understanding how important this single preventive measure is," noted Dr. Fox. "Having the support of our medical staff not only benefits hospitalized patients, but the wider community in which they practice. They model the healthy habits they prescribe for their patients."