

County of Santa Clara

Public Health Department

Health Officer
976 Lenzen Avenue, 2nd Floor
San José, CA 95126
408-792-5040



DATE: October 17, 2019

TO: Licensed Acute Care Hospitals, Skilled Nursing Facilities and other Long-term Care Facilities, Outpatient Clinics in Santa Clara County

FROM: Sara H. Cody, MD
Health Officer and Public Health Director

RE: Updated Health Officer Order for Annual Influenza Immunization Programs for Healthcare Workers or Masking of Healthcare Workers during the Influenza Season

In July 2012, Dr. Marty Fenstersheib issued a Health Officer order (www.sccphd.org/vax-mask-memo), mandating that all healthcare facilities in Santa Clara County require their healthcare workers (HCWs) to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they declined, to wear a mask during the influenza season. That order has remained in effect since then. The purpose of this updated order is to define the influenza season to be from November 1 to April 30 (rather than March 31) of every year. This time frame is based on statewide influenza epidemiology and is in alignment with other counties in California. However, in any given year, I may extend the period of the order depending on local influenza surveillance data. Like the order issued in 2012, this order will continue to remain in effect for all future years.

Influenza is highly contagious. On average, influenza affects 8 percent of the US population every year [1], leading to over 10 million outpatient visits and more than 300,000 hospitalizations annually since 2012 [2]. Everyone is at risk for being infected with the influenza virus, and serious problems related to influenza can occur at any age. Unvaccinated HCWs are at risk for influenza illness and can transmit the virus to their patients and coworkers. Patients in healthcare facilities, especially young children, pregnant women, adults at least 50 years of age, and those with chronic health conditions, are at greater risk for influenza infection and subsequent complications.

Vaccination of HCWs against influenza reduces infections and absenteeism and results in financial savings to the healthcare system and to our communities. Healthy People 2020 objectives target a 90 percent seasonal influenza vaccination rate for all healthcare personnel [3]. HCWs in hospitals in Santa Clara County have achieved influenza vaccination rates between 82 and 85 percent in recent influenza seasons [4].

To reduce the spread of influenza viruses in healthcare facilities and the incidence of employee absenteeism during influenza season, I am re-issuing a Health Officer order to mandate that all acute care hospitals, skilled nursing facilities and other long-term care facilities, and outpatient clinics in Santa Clara County require their HCWs to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask when they are in contact with patients during the influenza season.

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State law mandates that hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities, and certain other healthcare facilities offer influenza vaccination annually to employees, and for those employees that decline such vaccination, maintain a record of the signed declination form [5]. This order enhances patient protection by requiring unvaccinated healthcare workers to wear a face mask in patient care areas during the influenza season.

Order

As the Health Officer for the County of Santa Clara, I hereby order every licensed acute care hospital, skilled nursing facility, other long-term care facility, and outpatient clinic in Santa Clara County to implement a program requiring its healthcare workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline for whatever reason, to wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season while in contact with patients or working in patient care areas.

Facilities Subject to this Order

This order applies to licensed acute care hospitals, skilled nursing facilities and other long-term care facilities, and outpatient clinics. For any other clinical facilities, we strongly recommend implementation of this policy as well.

Definition of Healthcare Worker

For the purposes of this order, “healthcare workers” are all persons, paid and unpaid, full-time or part-time, employees or contractors, who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas in a licensed healthcare facility subject to this order.

Duration of Order

This order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless specifically rescinded. The influenza season is hereby defined as November 1 through April 30. In any given year, if influenza surveillance data suggest that the influenza season is different than November 1 to April 30, this period may be amended by a future order.

Reporting

If requested by the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department, facilities must report their influenza immunization rates among healthcare workers within the requested timeframe.

The mission of the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department is to protect and improve the health of our community. Facilities that fully comply with this order will help to achieve this mission. For any questions, please contact the Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Program at 408-885-4214 or disease@phd.sccgov.org.

1 <https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/66/10/1511/4682599>

2 <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/index.html>

3 <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/immunization-and-infectious-diseases/objectives>

4 <https://data.chhs.ca.gov/dataset/test-cdph-health-care-personnel-influenza-vaccination>

5 California Health and Safety Code §1288.7(a)