

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 21, 2019

TO: Hospitals, Ambulatory and Community Clinics, Skilled Nursing and other Long Term Care Facilities, other Licensed Health Care Facilities, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Provider Organizations.

FROM: Robert M. Levin, MD *RL*
Health Officer

SUBJECT: Mandatory Influenza Vaccination or Masking of Health Care Workers During Influenza Season

As Health Officer for Ventura County, I am now re-issuing a Health Officer order mandating that all licensed health care facilities and ambulances in Ventura County require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask during the influenza season while working in patient care areas.

Rationale

During the 2018-19 influenza season, activity peaked in mid to late February when EpiCenter data indicated that influenza-like illness comprised up to 30% of all ER admits in Ventura County. The influenza season was unusually long, running from mid-December into April. Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 predominated from the beginning of the 2018-19 season and into January, at which time H3N2 became the predominant influenza A strain locally. While there wasn't a clearly defined secondary peak of influenza activity due to H3N2, this is likely the cause of the prolonged season. There were a small number of influenza B cases throughout the season. Subtyping indicated both BVictoria and BYamagata strains were circulating at a very low level locally.

Influenza infection affects 5-15% of the US population every year. The CDC estimates that nationally, from October 1, 2018 through May 4, 2019 there were between 37.4 million and 42.9 million illnesses, between 531,000 and 647,000 hospitalizations and between 36,300 and 61,200 deaths due to flu. HCWs are both at risk for influenza and can transmit the virus to their vulnerable patients. Influenza vaccination of HCWs protects patients and reduces employee absenteeism during influenza season. State law requires that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccinations to employees (Cal. Health & Safety Code, §1288.7, subd. (a); 8 Cal. Code Regs., § 5199, subd. (c)(6)(D) and (h)(10)). If hospital employees decline vaccination, they are required to sign a declination statement in lieu of vaccination (Cal. Health & Safety Code, §1288.7, subd. (a); 8 Cal. Code Regs., § 5199, subd. (c)(6)(D) and (h)(10)). This order enhances patient protection by requiring unvaccinated HCWs to wear a face mask in patient care areas during the influenza season. Mandatory vaccination combined with masking policies for unvaccinated HCWs have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates.

In your role as a health care facility or EMS provider and mine as Health Officer, we share common desires: reduce the spread of serious diseases such as influenza, provide outstanding health care, and protect our HCWs. Our goal is to increase rates of influenza vaccination of HCWs, reduce employee absenteeism during influenza season, and reduce HCW-to-patient transmission of influenza. While compliance rates with the laws referenced above are high, actual HCW vaccination rates are not and may be below the level that will reduce the spread of infection in our health care

facilities. Mandatory vaccination or masking policies have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates to above 95%.

Order

I, as the Health Officer of Ventura County, am requiring that each and every licensed health care facility and EMS provider organization in Ventura County implement a program requiring its health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season while working in patient care areas in that health care facility or while caring for EMS patients.

Authority for Order

This order is issued pursuant to Section 120175 of the California Health and Safety Code, which authorizes local health officers to take measures as may be necessary to prevent the spread of communicable disease or occurrence of additional cases.

Duration of Order

This order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded. The influenza season is defined as November 1 to April 30 of the following year. In any given year, if influenza surveillance data demonstrate an unusually late peak and continued widespread influenza activity in the spring, I may extend the period during which the masking program shall apply for that year.

Facilities Subject to the Order

This order applies to hospitals, ambulatory and community clinics, skilled nursing and other long term care facilities, jail medical facilities, dialysis centers, any other licensed health care facility and EMS provider organizations.

Definition of HCWs

For the purposes of this order, "health care workers" or "HCWs" are persons, paid and unpaid, working in licensed health care settings who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas, including EMS prehospital care and interfacility transfers.

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of Ventura County. For any additional questions, please contact our Ventura County Public Health Division of Communicable Diseases at 805 981-5201 or e-mail to PH-Admin@ventura.org