



Health and Human Services Agency

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TO: General Acute Care Hospital CEOs, Human Resource, Medical and Nursing Directors; Skilled Nursing Facility Administrative, Medical and Nursing Directors; Community Health Center Administrative, Medical, and Nursing Directors; Adult Day Health Center Administrative, Medical, and Nursing Directors; Dialysis Centers; Infection Control Practitioners; Health Facility Occupational Health Directors; Pre-Hospital Care Ambulance Provider Administrators; Communicable Disease Public Health Nurses; and Physicians, Physician Assistants, Nurse Practitioners and Medical Office Managers

RE: Health Officer Order for Influenza Vaccine for Healthcare Workers or Mask

Date: August 16, 2013

As Health Officer for Shasta County, I am **issuing an order mandating that all licensed health care facilities and ambulance services in Shasta County require their health care workers (HCW) 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

Influenza infection affects 5-15% of the US population every year, leading to an estimated 36,000 deaths, 3.1 million days of hospitalization and 31.4 million outpatient visits annually. HCW are at risk for influenza themselves and can transmit the virus to their patients, families and coworkers. Patients in health care facilities are particularly vulnerable to influenza complications. Multiple studies have demonstrated that vaccinating HCW against influenza helps to protect against illness in healthcare settings.

National Healthy People 2020 objectives target a 90% seasonal influenza vaccination rate for all health care workers. The HCW flu vaccine rate among total employees of four acute care hospitals combined in Shasta County was 69% in 2011-12, and 71% in 2012-13. Nearly 30% of local hospital employees, nearly 900 HCW's, were not vaccinated against influenza. The LTC staff flu vaccine rate in U.S. was even lower at 52% in 2011-12 (only data available). Mandatory vaccination or mask policies commonly increase HCW vaccination rates to >95%.

Goals

The goals of this order are to:

- protect patients, HCW and their families, from influenza disease, hospitalization and death by increasing rates of influenza vaccination of HCW;

- reduce HCW to patient transmission of influenza and vice versa;
- maintain a healthy workforce by providing a safe work environment;
- reduce employee absenteeism during influenza season;
- reduce financial costs to health care facilities, HCW and patients;
- reduce morbidity and mortality among the general population; and
- support quality health care.

Order:

As the Health Officer of Shasta County, I am requiring that each licensed health care facility and ambulance service in Shasta 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.

Duration of Order

This order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season, unless the order is rescinded by the Shasta County Health Officer. The influenza season is defined as **November 1 to March 31** each flu season. (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. You will be notified in writing if this extension is necessary.)

Facilities Subject to the Order

This order applies to all licensed health care facilities in Shasta County, including, but not limited to, hospitals, skilled nursing and long term care facilities, home health agencies, dialysis and ambulatory surgical centers. This order also applies to ambulance services.

Enforcement

Facilities and agencies covered by this order shall determine the means of implementation and enforcement within their organization (e.g., adoption and evaluation of policies, use of incentives or penalties, suspension of professional privileges, suspension without pay, condition of employment for new employees).

Definition of Health Care Workers (HCW)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which has recommended influenza vaccine for HCW since 1981, defines HCW in this context, as all persons, paid and unpaid, working in health care settings who have potential for exposure to patients or to infectious materials or contaminated surfaces or air-- including not only physicians, nurses, nursing assistants, therapists, technicians, pharmacists, EMS, lab, dental, contractual and home health personnel, students and trainees, but also maintenance, security, billing, laundry, house-keeping, chaplains, dietary, clerical and personnel. HCW include those in full-time and part-time positions, as well as employees, contractors, medical staff (licensed independent practitioners) and volunteers, with direct patient contact or working in patient areas.

Definition of Mask

Simple surgical masks will meet the requirement of this order. In general, masks should be changed or appropriately discarded when leaving patient care areas, going off duty, or becoming soiled or wet. N95 respirators are not required.

Legal Authority

The Health Officer has the authority to “take measures as may be necessary to prevent and control the spread of disease within the territory under their jurisdiction” (CA Health and Safety Code §120175). State law requires that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccinations to employees. If employees decline vaccination, they are required to sign a declination statement in lieu of vaccination. A violation of these provisions (by the employer) is punishable as a misdemeanor (CA Health and Safety Code, §1288.7, effective January 1, 2007, and Aerosol Transmissible Diseases standard of Cal OSHA §5199, effective September 1, 2010).

Beginning January, 2013, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) required acute care hospitals to report HCW influenza vaccination rates as part of its Hospital Inpatient Quality Reporting Program. These numbers will be available to the public. Beginning January, 2014, CMS may impose financial penalties on facilities that have not achieved a 90% vaccination rate among their health care workers. In addition, CMS has announced that hospital-acquired infections – including nosocomial influenza – will no longer be reimbursed.

Conclusion

Note that numerous other jurisdictions, hospitals and other health care facilities in California, and across the nation, have similar policies or mandates, including Tehama County. Numerous professional medical societies, patient safety and other organizations endorse such a policy.

We appreciate your leadership and support in protecting the residents of our community.

For any additional questions, please see the attached “**Health Officer Order for HCW Influenza Vaccine or Mask Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**” first, then contact Kate Pasley, RN, PHN, Director of Nursing, Shasta County Health & Human Services Agency—Public Health at 530-225-5621 or kpasley@co.shasta.ca.us

Sincerely,



Andrew Deckert, MD, MPH
Health Officer, Shasta County

Please distribute to all providers in your practice