



County of Fresno

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
DAVID POMAVILLE, DIRECTOR

September 16, 2014

Hospitals, Skilled Nursing, and other Long Term Care Facilities

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

During the 2013-14 influenza season, Fresno County Department of Public Health issued a letter strongly recommending that hospitals and health care facilities require annual influenza vaccine for all health care worker (HCW) employees, or the wearing of a surgical mask when engaged in direct patient care. The 2013-14 influenza season witnessed a resurgence in H1N1 influenza in Fresno County and the nation. In total, there were 22 deaths associated with influenza and 18 additional intensive care unit hospitalizations among our residents 0-64 years old.

Influenza infection accounts for an estimated 30,000 excess deaths in the US each year; 90% of which are in persons > 65 years of age. 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 (California Health & Safety Code, §1288.7, subd. (a); 8 California Code of Regulations, §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 (California Health & Safety Code §1288.7, subd. (a); 8 California Code of Regulations, §5199, subd. (c)(6)(D) and (h)(10)).

This order, herein, 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.

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.

Order

I, as the Interim Health Officer of the County of Fresno, am requiring that each and every acute care hospital implement a program requiring its health care workers to have received an annual influenza vaccination prior to the beginning of the designated influenza season, noted herein, or if they decline, to wear a mask for the duration of the designated influenza season, noted herein, while working in patient care areas within that health care facility.

Promotion, preservation and protection of the community's health

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Duration of Order

This order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded. The influenza season is designated as December 15 to March 31 of the following year. In any given year, if influenza surveillance data demonstrate unusually early and/or late peaks, I may extend the period during which the masking program shall apply for that year.

Recommendation to All Other Facilities

I, as the Interim Health Officer of the County of Fresno, am strongly recommending that each and every health care facility 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 designated influenza season while working in patient care areas in that health care facility

Definition of HCWs

For the purpose of this order, "health care workers" or "HCWs" are persons, paid or unpaid, working in health care settings who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas and include volunteers and physicians and providers on the facility's medical staff.

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of the County of Fresno. For any additional questions, please contact our Communicable Disease Investigations Program at (559) 600-3332.

Sincerely,



Ken Bird, M.D., M.P.H.
Interim Health Officer

KB:jm

cc: David Pomaville, Director
David Luchini, Assistant Director