



# Ventura County Public Health

A Division of the Ventura County Health Care Agency

**RIGOBERTO VARGAS, MPH**  
Director

**ROBERT M. LEVIN, MD**  
Health Officer/Medical Director

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** October 13, 2015

**TO:** Public Health Employees

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

**SUBJECT:** Mandatory Influenza Vaccination or Masking of Public Health Employees During Influenza Season

In your role as a Ventura County Public Health employee and mine as Health Officer, we share common goals: to reduce the spread of serious diseases such as influenza, provide outstanding services, and protect our employees. The goal of this order is to increase rates of influenza vaccination of Public Health Department employees, reduce absenteeism during influenza season, and reduce employee-to-public transmission of influenza. While compliance rates with the laws referenced herein are high, actual Public Health Department employee vaccination rates may not be, and may be below the level that will reduce the spread of infection in our Public Health Department sites. Mandatory vaccination or masking policies have been shown to increase vaccination rates to above 95% when applied to health care settings.

As Health Officer for Ventura County, I am hereby issuing a Health Officer order mandating that all Public Health employees working in one of the below-listed programs receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask during the influenza season while interacting with the public. This action is consistent with my recently re-issued County-wide mandatory influenza vaccination order for all health care workers in our county.

### **Rationale**

Influenza infection affects 5-15% of the US population every year, leading to an estimated 3.1 million days of hospitalization and 31.4 million outpatient visits. Influenza accounts for an estimated 36,000 deaths in the US each year, 90% of which are in persons older than 65 years of age. State law requires that 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)). This is the second year that health care workers in our County have been required by Public Health to vaccinate or mask. It seems appropriate that as Public Health we should lead this effort by example. Public Health employees are at risk for influenza and can transmit the virus to their vulnerable public contacts. Influenza vaccination of Public Health employees protects the most vulnerable members of the public and reduces employee

absenteeism during influenza season. Protection of the vulnerable public will be enhanced by requiring unvaccinated Public Health employees to wear a face mask in public interaction areas during the influenza season. Mandatory vaccination combined with masking policies for unvaccinated employees have been shown to increase health care worker vaccination rates.

### **Order**

**I, as the Health Officer of Ventura County, hereby order that the below listed programs within Ventura County Public Health implement plans requiring employees to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season while working in areas where there are public interactions.** For those employees who choose to wear a mask, free masks will be available at the Public Health Clinic on the first floor of the Public Health building in North Oxnard, 2240 E. Gonzales Road, suite 140, or in Public Health Administration on the second floor.

### **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 December 1 to March 31 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.

### **Public Health Program Employees Subject to this Order**

This order applies to Public Health employees in the following programs: Childrens Health Promotion, W.I.C., Tobacco Cessation, Tobacco Bus, Diabetes Case Management, Nutrition Education, HEAL Zone, Vital Records, Immunizations, Chronic Disease Prevention Program, Lead Poisoning Prevention, AFLP, Field Nursing, HIV/AIDS, Public Health Clinics, Communicable Diseases, Tuberculosis, Foster Care, Oral Health, CHDP, CMS, Emergency Medical Services and the Public Health Laboratory.

### **Definition of Public Health Employees**

For the purposes of this order, “Public Health employees” are persons, paid and unpaid, working in the above listed programs who have direct contact with the public or who work in public contact areas.

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of Ventura County. For any additional questions, please contact our Communicable Disease program at 805 981-5201.