



Edwin M. Lee
Mayor

Barbara A. Garcia, MPA
Director of Health

Tomás J. Aragón, MD, DrPH
Health Officer

MEMORANDUM

DATE: 2012-09-21

TO: Hospitals, Skilled Nursing, and other Long Term Care Facilities

FROM: Tomás J. Aragón, MD, DrPH
Health Officer

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

As in previous years, I am issuing a Health Officer order mandating that all hospitals, skilled nursing, and other long term care facilities in the City and County of San Francisco require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask in patient care areas during the influenza season.

For other clinical facilities and ambulatory care centers, we strongly recommend implementation of a similar policy.

Rationale

Influenza infection accounts for an estimated 36,000 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. (Cal. Health & Saf. 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 & Saf. 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.

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 Health Officer of the City and County of San Francisco, am requiring that each and every health care facility in San Francisco 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.

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 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.

Facilities Subject to the Order

This order applies to hospitals, skilled nursing, and other long term care facilities.

Definition of HCWs

For the purposes of this order, “health care workers” or “HCWs” are persons, paid and unpaid, working in health care settings who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas.

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of the City and County of San Francisco. For any additional questions, please contact our Communicable Disease Control Unit 415-554-2830.

cc: Barbara A. Garcia, MPA, Director of Health
Aleeta Van Runkle, City Attorney