



Tuolumne County Public Health Department

Liza M. Ortiz, MD, MPH
Health Officer

Kathy Amos, RN, PHN
Director of Public Health Nursing

*Tuolumne County Health Department
20111 Cedar Rd. North
Sonora, CA 95370
Office: 209-533-7401
Fax: 209-533-7406*

NEWS RELEASE

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TO: News Media

FROM: Liza M. Ortiz, MD, MPH

Tuolumne County Health Officer

RE: Health Officer Order for Masking of Health Care Workers without Influenza Vaccination

On September 22, 2015, the Tuolumne County Public Health Department released an order from Dr. Liza M. Ortiz, Tuolumne County Health Officer, mandating that all licensed health care facilities in Tuolumne County require their healthcare workers (HCW's) to receive an annual influenza vaccination, or if they decline or are unable to receive a vaccine, to wear a surgical mask while working with patients during influenza season. Healthcare workers include all of the doctors, nurses, counselors, ancillary healthcare providers, technicians and other support staff working in hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and other licensed care facilities in Tuolumne County.

An estimated 3,000 to 49,000 people die in the United States each year due to influenza. Those at greatest risk of complications of influenza - the elderly, the very young, pregnant mothers, and people with chronic illnesses - make up a majority of those living in healthcare settings where viral illnesses like influenza can be particularly devastating. Even though the effectiveness of the influenza vaccine varies each year, research has shown that influenza rates are lower when hospital and clinic staff have higher rates of vaccination against influenza. In addition to hand washing and good hygiene, influenza vaccine remains one of the most effective ways to limit transmission of influenza in communities.

For HCWs who decline to receive a seasonal influenza vaccination, they will be required to wear a surgical mask while working in patient care areas during influenza season, between November 1 and March 31 each year. HCWs include those who work directly with patients in hospitals and other licensed settings including emergency medical services.

In addition to protecting the wearer from transmitting the influenza virus, masking requirements have strongly and consistently raised vaccination rates among healthcare workers. Vaccination remains the best way to prevent influenza infection and influenza transmission. Influenza vaccination rates need to exceed 90% in a population to prevent the further transmission of the influenza virus in a community.

For questions, please call the Tuolumne County Health Department at 209-533-7401.