



Vaccination of Health Care Workers for Influenza

Date: October 19, 2012

To: Sonoma County health care providers, hospitals, skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), residential care facilities for the elderly (RCFEs), residential facilities for the developmentally disabled, and dialysis centers.

From: Lynn Silver Chalfin, MD, MPH Health Officer

Re: Requirement for Influenza Vaccination of Certain Health Care Workers in Sonoma County

Influenza season is beginning. In your roles as leaders in health care, and mine as the County Health Officer, I know we share common goals: to minimize the spread of communicable diseases like influenza and pertussis, to provide outstanding health care for our citizens, and to keep our health care work force healthy. Immunization of health care workers is a crucial step toward reaching these goals. In 2012 alone Sonoma

County had several significant influenza outbreaks in residential health facilities.

Influenza affects 5-15% of the U.S. population every year, leading to an estimated 3.1 million days of hospitalization and 31.4 million outpatient visits. Health care workers are both at risk for influenza and can transmit the virus to their patients and co-workers. As you know, patients in our health care facilities are particularly vulnerable to influenza. Young children, pregnant women, the elderly and those with chronic health conditions are at greater risk for influenza related hospitalization and death¹.

Vaccination of health care workers prevents illness and mortality in their patients, reduces infection and absenteeism, and results in financial savings to families and to the health care system. The best way to prevent nosocomial transmission of a disease like influenza to those persons we serve is to mandate vaccination of health care workers. There are now two rules in California requiring flu vaccine for health care workers (CA Health & Safety Code §1288.7 effective January 1, 2007 affecting acute care hospital staff and §5199 Aerosol Transmissible Diseases standard of Cal OSHA, effective September 1, 2010, affecting a broader range of healthcare workers). Hospitals are required to offer flu vaccine to their employees. Health care providers in Sonoma County must adhere to these standards, which also represent the recommendations of multiple professional bodies, including the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology and the Society for Health Care Epidemiology of America. While compliance with the requirement to offer vaccination is generally high, not enough health care workers take advantage of the opportunity to be vaccinated. . In Sonoma County, hospital rates of influenza vaccination of employees in the 2011-12 flu season ranged from 64 to 87%. Rates for many health facilities are not available. For non-employees in some Sonoma County hospitals rates are as low as 23%²

Therefore, in addition to full adherence to these laws, as the Health Officer, I am requiring that all health care workers in certain health care facilities either receive the influenza vaccine, or if they fail to do so, they must wear a standard surgical mask during influenza season whenever working.

Additionally, I strongly recommend that health care workers in outpatient care and other health care settings be vaccinated, however no new requirement is being created this time.

I also strongly recommend (but do not require) that health care administrators adopt additional measures to increase uptake of vaccination. Successful measures have included: providing incentives for employees to be vaccinated, using rolling carts to make immunizations available at work stations,

¹ Noelle-Angelique M. Molinari , Ismael R. Ortega-Sanchez , Mark L. Messonnier aWilliam W. Thompsonc, Pascale M. Wortley , Eric Weintraub , Carolyn B. Bridges . The annual impact of seasonal influenza in the US: Measuring disease burden and costs_ *Vaccine* 25 (2007) 5086–5096.

² CDPH unpublished data 2011-12.

creating an easy way to identify the health care workers who have received their influenza vaccine such as placing an identifying sticker on the health care worker's badge following vaccination, or otherwise monitoring vaccine uptake and reaching out to un-vaccinated staff systematically; incorporating the vaccination requirement into information for new employees.

Many institutions nationwide and in California are going even further and making flu vaccine a condition of employment - only allowing exceptions to vaccination for those meeting any of the recognized specific medical contraindications or religious circumstances. For a list of other institutions, states, and federal mandates with this requirement, please see <http://www.immunize.org/honor-roll/>.

Please be advised that the new CalOSHA ATD standard requires that health care workers must wear an N-95 (or higher level) respirator when caring for individuals with airborne infectious diseases, such as influenza and pertussis, regardless of the health care worker's immunization status. For an overview of the CalOSHA regulation, please see http://hrideas.com/downloads/DOSH_ATD_Summary.pdf

Order:

As the Health Officer for Sonoma County, I am requiring that each and every health care facility in Sonoma County, of the types specified below, implement a program requiring its health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination, and if they decline, to wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season while working in patient care areas of that health care facility.

Duration:

This order is ongoing and applies to each and every influenza season unless the order is rescinded. The influenza season is defined as November 1 through March 31 of the following year. However for calendar year 2012 the masking requirement will only go into effect December 15, 2012 through March 31 2013. In any given year, if surveillance data demonstrates an unusual time course, I may modify the period during which the masking requirement will apply for that season.

Facilities subject to the Order:

This order applies to hospitals, skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), residential care facilities for the elderly (RCFEs), residential facilities for the developmentally disabled, and dialysis centers.

Definition of Health Care Worker:

For the purpose of this order, "health care workers" are persons, paid or unpaid, working in the above specified health care facilities, having direct patient contact or working in patient care areas.

Exemption:

Health care workers who provide their employer or facility with documentation from their medical provider of an ACIP recognized medical contraindication to both inactivated and live attenuated vaccination may opt out of masking.

I thank you for your assistance in working with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services to make Sonoma County a healthier community. If you have questions, please call Mary Miller, RN at 565-4567 or Kim Caldewey, PA, MPH of the Public Health Division, at 565-4582.

Signed,

Lynn Silver, MD, MPH, FAAP
Health Officer