County of San Diego

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WILMA J. WOOTEN, M.D., M.P.H.
PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

DATE: November 4, 2014

TO: Licensed Acute Care Hospitals, Skilled Nursing Facilities, Long-Term Care Facilities, Ambulatory and Community Clinics, and Ambulance Providers in San Diego County

FROM: Wilma J. Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., Health Officer and Director, Public Health Services

SUBJECT: Health Officer Order for Influenza Vaccination Program or Masking of Health Care Personnel during Annual Influenza Season

As Health Officer for San Diego County, **I am issuing a Health Officer Order mandating that all licensed acute care hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities, ambulatory and community clinics, and ambulance providers in San Diego County require their health care personnel (HCP) to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask while in contact with patients or working in patient care areas during the annual influenza season**. This action will help to lower the risk of transmission of influenza to patients.

RATIONALE

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), influenza affects approximately 5 to 20 percent of the United States population each year. Influenza is estimated to cause over 200,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 to 49,000 deaths annually nationwide. Last year, San Diego reported 70 influenza-related deaths; the highest number in recent history. Persons with chronic medical conditions, infants and children, seniors, and pregnant women are at greater risk for severe influenza-related illnesses and deaths. All HCP are at risk for both contracting influenza and transmitting the virus to their vulnerable patients. Patients in our health care facilities are especially vulnerable to influenza. Therefore, vaccinations of HCP protect patients and reduce employee absenteeism during influenza season.

The CDC recommends that all HCP, including physicians, nurses, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, employees of nursing homes and chronic care facilities, students in these professions, and volunteers, should receive annual vaccination against influenza.

There are now two legislative actions in California requiring that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccinations to employees: 1) California Health & Safety Code §1288.7(a), effective July 1, 2007 and affecting acute care hospital staff. 2) California Code of Regulations, Title 8, §5199 (c)(6)(D) and (h)(10), Aerosol Transmissible Diseases standard of CalOSHA; effective September 1, 2010 and affecting a broader range of healthcare workers. If hospital employees decline vaccination, they are required to sign a declination statement in lieu of vaccination. While compliance rates with these State laws are high, actual HCP vaccination rates are not optimal and may be below the level necessary to reduce the spread of infection in our health care facilities. In San Diego County, during the 2012-13 influenza season, hospital rates of influenza vaccination of employees ranged from 57% to 99%. For selected categories of non-employees in some San Diego County hospitals, rates were as low as 17%. A recent study also showed higher coverage occurring in facilities with institutional requirements for influenza vaccination of employees.

The Healthy People 2020 targets a 90% seasonal influenza vaccination rate for all HCP. Despite the national recommendation and goal, HCP influenza vaccination rates are well below the Healthy People 2020 target. Also of note, the Joint Commission has now included the Healthy People 2020 objective for influenza vaccination coverage as a part of hospital accreditation requirements.

ORDER

Pursuant to my authority under §120175 of the California Health and Safety Code, I , as the Health Officer of the County of San Diego, hereby order that licensed acute care hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities, ambulatory and community clinics, and ambulance providers in San Diego County implement a program requiring its health care personnel to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season, while in contact with patients or working in patient care areas.

PERSONS COVERED

For the purposes of this Order, "health care personnel" are all persons, including paid and unpaid employees, contractors, students, and volunteers, who work in areas where patient care is provided in a licensed facility subject to this Order or who otherwise have direct contact with patients at such a 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 November 1 to March 31 of the following year. In any given year, if influenza surveillance data demonstrate unusually early and/or late peaks, the Health Officer may extend the period during which the masking program shall apply for that year. In such case, the Health Officer shall communicate this change in writing to all affected facilities.

The San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) Public Health Services Division (local health department) shares with all healthcare professionals and facilities the goal of assuring that our local population receives safe and effective care. We trust that all settings subject to this Order will comply fully with it and will notify their HCP of its provisions. We hope that HCP in other facilities, such as private physicians' offices, will follow the strong recommendation that they voluntarily adopt the same protective procedures.

Health Officer Order Resources
For additional information regarding this Health Officer Order, the following documents can be found at the County of San Diego, HHSA Public Health Services, Immunization Program website at http://www.sdiz.org/.

☐ Fact Sheet: Influenza Vaccination for Health Care Personnel
☐ Frequently Asked Questions about Influenza Vaccinations

Further questions may be directed to the County Immunization Program at (866) 358-2966 or e-mail to info@sdiz.org.

See Attachment to this Document: *Supporting Rational for Requiring Influenza Vaccination or Masking for Health Care Personnel*