



San Benito County

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

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Healthy People in Healthy Communities



Date: 30 November 2012
To: All Health-Care Facilities Administrators and Staff
From: County Public Health Officer
Subject: Flu Vaccination or Mask for All Health-Care Workers (HCW)

The annual flu season is here and next week is National Influenza Vaccination Week. It's a good time to remember that we can all minimize the harmful and costly impacts of the flu on us and our families, friends, co-workers, clients, patients, communities, and county.

Flu season is generally through the fall and winter (November through March), with a peak in February, but can extend to other months. In the U.S., yearly flu infections are in the millions, related hospitalizations are more than 200,000, and related deaths have been as low as 3,000 and as high as 49,000. That equates to a lot of preventable misery, reduced productivity, and time lost from work.

The national recommendation is for influenza vaccination for persons aged ≥ 6 months. The U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have noted that only three of five nurses and other HCW get vaccinated, yet we are just as vulnerable as anyone for getting sick and spreading the flu. Many flu outbreaks linked to HCW have been documented in hospital wards and long-term care facilities. Conversely, high rates of vaccination of HCW have been linked to improved patient outcomes, reduced absenteeism, and reduced flu infection among staff.

California state law (Health & Safety Code §1288.7 / Cal OSHA §5199) requires either flu vaccination or the signing of a declination statement for all acute care hospital workers and most health-care personnel including clinic and office-based staff.

Thus, in the spirit of our shared common goals of providing high-quality and safe patient care, I recommend and strongly urge that all HCW get **flu vaccine** or use a **mask** during the flu season. We urge all health care facilities (hospitals, clinics, skilled nursing and other long-term care facilities) in the county to adopt and implement policies to require all HCW (paid or not, and meaning those who provide direct patient care or who generally work in patient care areas) to receive the annual flu vaccine or to wear a mask during the flu season.

Highly important actions that we should all take now and through the flu season are:

1. Get flu vaccinated;
2. If or when ill, stay home from work or school or other public spaces;
3. If and when you have to cough or sneeze, do it into your arm at the elbow;
4. Wash your hands often.

The role that you and other HCW play in preventing flu-related illness and death is invaluable. Please set a good leadership example by getting flu-vaccinated every year and help spread flu facts instead of the flu to your families, friends, co-workers, clients, patients, communities, and county.

For more information, you may access <http://www.flu.gov/> and, to find where vaccine is available, you may access <http://flushot.healthmap.org/>.

Many thanks for everything you do every day to get and stay healthy and to improve everyone's lives in our communities and county.