

COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

PUBLIC HEALTH BRANCH

MICHELE STEPHENS, DIRECTOR

DONALD BAIRD, M.D., HEALTH OFFICER

529 I Street Eureka, CA 95501

(707) 445-6200 Fax (707) 445-7346



To: Humboldt County Healthcare Providers
From: Donald Baird, M.D. Humboldt County Health Officer
Re: **Health Officer Order; Mandatory Influenza Vaccination or Masking**

October 26, 2017

As the Health Officer for Humboldt County, I am ordering ALL health care workers in patient care areas within acute and long term care facilities to receive the influenza vaccine, or failing this, they must wear a standard surgical mask during influenza season (starting November 1st through March 31st) when in patient care areas.

Each year, more than 200,000 persons are hospitalized and 36,000 people die from the flu. These are preventable deaths. Requiring an annual flu vaccine is not only in keeping with the recommendations of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, flu immunization also demonstrates our commitment to protecting the safety and health of our patients, many of whom already have weakened immune systems.

Although vaccination for health care personnel has been recommended for years, vaccination rates continue to lag. The majority of Health Officers in California have addressed this by issuing a similar vaccine/mandatory masking policy, to protect our facilities' visitors, our co-workers and our own families.

Who does this policy apply to? The influenza vaccination/mandatory masking policy applies to all individuals, employees, faculty, staff, temporary workers, trainees, volunteers, students, and vendors, who provide services to patients or work in patient care areas within acute and long term care facilities. Although masking will not be required for routine outpatient areas, it is strongly recommended (exceptions to this include outpatient services for dialysis, chemotherapy, obstetrics, and surgery where masking is mandatory). The order requires each facility develop and implement a flu vaccine and masking program requiring health care workers who do not receive the influenza vaccine wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season. The order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded.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.

Why can't we stick with just doing a better job of hand hygiene to prevent transmission of flu? Health care personnel can serve as a vehicle to transmit influenza even when they don't have symptoms. Studies have found that health care personnel with influenza-like symptoms work an average of 2.5 days while ill, and those infected with influenza can transmit the virus to others even before their symptoms begin. Research shows that influenza vaccination of health care personnel decreases patient mortality, risk of nosocomial infection, and absenteeism while limiting the risk of bringing illness acquired at work home to family members.

I'm very healthy and never get the flu. Why should I get the flu vaccine? Working in a health care environment increases your risk of exposure. You may become infected and experience only mild symptoms but still pass the virus to patients, co-workers and members of your family. Our highest priority must be to protect our patients, many of whom are exceptionally vulnerable to adverse outcomes from the flu.

I'm very familiar with the symptoms of the flu, and I stay home when I am sick. So, there is very little chance that I would infect my co-workers or patients. Why should I get the vaccine? The signs and symptoms of the flu may not appear for a day or two after you contract influenza, during which time you could unknowingly infect patients and co-workers.

I am pregnant. Should I get the flu vaccine? YES! Pregnant women can and should receive influenza vaccine at any time, during any trimester. This is especially important because pregnant women are more likely to have serious complications for themselves and their baby if they get the flu.