



In previous years, Humboldt County Public Health has issued an Order for influenza vaccination for HCW's in hospitals, skilled nursing facilities and long term care settings. The alternative was masking throughout the flu season for both those who could not be vaccinated due to medical contraindications and those who chose not to be vaccinated. This year, the reality of universal masking due to the COVID-19 pandemic, obviates the need for this Order.

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize the critical need for influenza vaccination for the 20/21 flu season. The combination of influenza and coronavirus circulating at the same time this year will not only make diagnosis challenging (since the two have similar symptoms) and increase demands on testing, but it could threaten our healthcare system's capacity to provide care for everyone who needs it, when they need it. Reducing flu cases as much as possible makes diagnosis easier, and preserves the ability to provide care for all.

- Development of workplace policies supporting flu vaccination help to ensure that staff are vaccinated for their own protection and the protection of members of the public. This practice is also recommended for all healthcare settings.

- Based on statewide influenza epidemiology and in accordance with the practice in many other California counties, this year we will again define the influenza season as spanning from November 1 through April 30 (11/1/2020-4/30/2021). Modifications may still be possible based on local epidemiology, but are unlikely to result in a shorter seasonal span.

I know we share common goals: to minimize the spread of communicable diseases, to provide outstanding healthcare for our community, and to keep workers healthy. Influenza infection leads to millions of outpatient visits, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of potentially preventable deaths every year. HCW's are at risk for influenza illness and can transmit the virus to their patients and coworkers. Patients in our health care facilities, especially young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and those with chronic health conditions, are at greater risk for influenza-related hospitalization and death.

Vaccination of health care workers against influenza reduces infection and absenteeism, prevents patient morbidity and mortality, and results in financial savings to our communities and the health care system.

State law provides that hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities, and certain other health care facilities must offer influenza vaccination annually to employees, and for those employees that decline such vaccination, maintain a record of the signed declination forms.



Definition of HCWs

For the purposes of this order, "health care workers" or "HCW's" are persons, paid and unpaid, full-time or part-time, employees or contractors, working in the licensed health care facility, who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas.

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of the County of Humboldt. For any additional questions, please contact the Humboldt County Public Health Department at 707-268-2182.

Dr. Teresa Frankovich
Humboldt County Health Officer

Date

cc: Infection Control Personnel, Medical Society, clinical facilities providing direct patient care

