

September 17, 2024

To: Hospitals, Skilled Nursing Facilities, Long Term Care Facilities, and Community Clinics

As in previous years, I am issuing a Health Officer order mandating that all hospitals, skilled nursing/other long-term care facilities, and community clinics in the County of Humboldt require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive annual influenza & COVID-19 vaccinations or, if they decline or are unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons, to wear a mask in patient care areas during the influenza season. For other clinical facilities providing direct patient care, we strongly recommend implementation of a similar policy.

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 October 1st through April 30th (10/01/2024-04/30/2025).

As leaders in health care, I know we share common goals: to minimize the spread of communicable diseases, provide outstanding healthcare for our community, and keep our workers healthy. Influenza infection leads to millions of outpatient visits, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, and hundreds of potentially preventable deaths every year. (1,2) In California right now, we continue to average 314 hospitalizations and 18 deaths per day from COVID. (3) Our health care system is still recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we enter respiratory virus season, HCWs are at risk for influenza, COVID-19, and RSV and they can transmit these viral infections 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 hospitalization and death from influenza and COVID-19. All community members are at increased risk of additional health complications if we are unable to adequately staff our medical facilities due to high rates of illness among health care workers.

Vaccination of health care workers against influenza and COVID-19 can reduce infection and absenteeism, decrease the severity of illness in individuals who do become infected, prevent patient morbidity and mortality, and results in financial savings to our communities and the health care system. Previous comprehensive mandatory vaccination programs that include masking for unvaccinated health care workers have been associated with health care worker vaccination rates above 95%. (4) 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. Federal law requires most health insurance providers to cover authorized COVID-19 vaccines without cost-sharing. This order enhances both protection of patients and our health care system by requiring unvaccinated health care workers to wear a face mask in patient care areas during the influenza season.



Definition of HCWs

For the purposes of this order, "health care workers" or "HCWs" 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 our health care workers and community members. For any additional questions, please contact Humboldt County Public Health at (707) 268-2182.

Dr. Candy Stockton, MD FASAM
Humboldt County Health Officer

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



1. Reed C, Chaves SS, Daily Kirley P, Emerson R, Aragon D, Hancock EB, et al. Estimating influenza disease burden from population-based surveillance data in the United States. PLoS One. 2015;10(3): e0118369.
2. See <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/past-seasons.html>
3. See <https://covid19.ca.gov/state-dashboard/>
4. Rakita, RM, et al. (2010). Mandatory influenza vaccination of health care workers: a 5- year study. *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology*, 31, 881-888.

Additional References:

<https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2014564118> (An evidence reviews of face masks against COVID-19)

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7106e1.htm> (Effectiveness of Face Mask or Respirator Use in Indoor Public Settings for Prevention of SARS-CoV-2 Infection—California, February-December 2021)

<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/09/22/letter-from-hhs-secretary-covid-19-vaccine-coverage.html> (Letter from HHS Secretary on COVID-19 Vaccine Coverage)

