

Amador County Public Health Department

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DATE: September 30, 2021

TO: Health Care Facility Administrators and Staff within Amador County

FROM: Rita Huspen Kerr, M.D., Amador County Health Officer

RE: Order for Licensed Healthcare Facilities to Implement a Mandatory Influenza Prevention Program for Health Care Workers

Background Information

In your role as leaders in healthcare and in mine as the Health Officer, I know we share common goals: to provide outstanding healthcare to our community, to minimize spread of communicable diseases like influenza, and to keep our healthcare workers (HCW) healthy. Influenza vaccination of HCW reduces infection and absenteeism, prevents mortality in our patients, results in financial savings to our health institutions, and keeps our greater community and economy healthy.

It has always been very important that all health care workers receive an annual influenza vaccine to protect themselves and co-workers, families, friends, and patients. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, getting a flu vaccine is more important than ever. It is likely that both the flu virus and COVID-19 virus will be spreading this fall and winter and recommends that all people 6 months and older get a yearly flu vaccine.

With a respiratory virus season that includes both influenza and COVID-19, the impacts to our healthcare system can be substantial. Influenza alone causes a significant number of hospitalizations and deaths every year in our country. With the possibility of influenza presenting similarly to COVID-19 in its initial phases, and the possibility of co-infections causing increased severity of illness, this season will be challenging, and it is imperative that we do our part to minimize the harm inflicted by influenza. Flu vaccination of all HCW will lead to improved patient outcomes and reduced flu infection among staff.

State law requires that acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccinations to employees or have the employee sign a declination statement if they choose not to be vaccinated. While compliance to these existing laws is high, actual HCW vaccination rates are not and may be below that which will blunt the spread of infection in a health care setting. Mandatory vaccination with masking policies have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates to above 90%.

My goal is to increase the rate of influenza vaccination of HCWs, reduce employee absenteeism and protect Amador County residents from influenza infection. I believe you share these goals. Therefore, I am issuing the following Health Officer Order:

Order

Pursuant to Health Officer authority under California Health & Safety Code §120175, I hereby order all health care facilities (hospitals, clinics, urgent care centers, skilled nursing and other long term-care facilities, physicians' offices, home healthcare and other similar health-care settings) in the County to adopt and implement policies and programs to require all HCW to receive the annual flu vaccine. In the rare circumstance that a HCW is exempt from vaccination, a face mask must be worn at all times while working.

Duration of Order

Unless and until rescinded, this Order applies during each influenza season, defined 1 November of one year to 30 April of the following year. If surveillance data in a particular year demonstrates that the flu season is different from these dates, then this time-period may be changed by a further order.

Definition of HCW

“Health Care Workers” (HCW) are all persons, including paid and unpaid employees, contractors, students, and volunteers, who work in settings where patient care or other service is provided.

We value the role that you and other HCW play in preventing flu-related illness and death. By getting vaccinated for the flu, HCW will undoubtedly be playing a significant part in mitigating the severity of the upcoming influenza season while the novel coronavirus is still circulating in our community.

We trust that all facilities subject to this Order will comply fully with it and will notify their HCW of its provisions.

We appreciate your cooperation, assistance, and support in protecting the residents of Amador County. If you have any questions, please contact Amador County Public Health Department at (209) 223-6407.

For more information, you may access <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

For state flu information:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/Influenza.aspx>