

Health Officer Order: Mandatory Influenza Prevention Program for Health Care Workers

Frequently Asked Questions 2021-2022 Season

Why is the Influenza Prevention Program for Health Care Workers needed?

Influenza is a disease with serious impact, and the most effective method of preventing influenza infection is vaccination. Health Care Workers (HCW) often care for patients at highest risk of severe disease, and are also at increased risk of exposure to influenza from ill patients. Even before the onset of symptoms, infected HCW can transmit influenza to patients and coworkers.

When does the order take effect?

The Health Officer Order is effective on November 1, 2021.

Which facilities are affected by the influenza mandate?

The Influenza Prevention Program order applies to all licensed health care facilities in Amador County. For more information and definitions of licensed health care facilities, see California Health & Safety Code Sections 1200-1209 and 1250-1264.

Those licensed health care facilities include clinics and community mental health centers. In particular "clinic" means organized outpatient health facility that provides direct medical, surgical, dental, optometric, or podiatric advice, services, or treatment to patients, including surgical clinics, chronic dialysis clinics, and rehabilitation clinics. "Clinic" also means an organized outpatient health facility which, provides direct psychological advice, services, or treatment to patients who remain less than 24 hours. The licensed health care facilities include general acute care hospital, intermediate care facility, congregate living health facility, correctional treatment center, nursing facility, hospice facility, acute psychiatric, chemical dependency recovery, pediatric day health and respite care facility.

The CDC defines influenza season as calendar weeks 40-20. Why does this order instead cover the dates November 1, 2021-April 30, 2022?

Availability of influenza vaccine is sometimes a challenge during the month of October due to high demand. November 1 is used in order to enable health care facilities ample opportunity to vaccinate HCWs by the effective date of the order. HCW should be offered influenza vaccine before influenza season as it can take up to two weeks to develop protection.

Influenza activity varies from year to year and is unpredictable. California generally sees an increase in cases in late December or early January and flu activity often peaks in February or March. The California Conference of Local Health Officers (CCLHO) has adopted a recommendation that all Health Officers use the dates of November 1-April 30 when issuing Health Officer Orders for influenza vaccination of HCWs. This will create a standardized practice across the state and eliminate discrepancies between jurisdictions.

What is the definition of health care personnel?

For the purposes of this order, and as per the CDC recommendations: Health Care Workers include (but are not limited to) physicians, nurses, nursing assistants, medical assistants, therapists, technicians, emergency medical service personnel, dental personnel, pharmacists, laboratory personnel, autopsy personnel, students and trainees, contractual staff not employed

by the health-care facility, and persons (e.g., clerical, dietary, housekeeping, laundry, security, maintenance, administrative, billing, and volunteers) not directly involved in patient care but potentially exposed to infectious agents that can be transmitted to and from health care workers and patients.

Can HCW decline influenza vaccination based on a religious or medical exemption?

Health care workers may decline influenza vaccination. However, HCW who are not vaccinated for influenza, whether through religious declination, or due to a medical exemption, must wear a mask at all times.

What kind of flu vaccine can a HCW receive?

Any influenza vaccine that is recommended for use by the ACIP for the 2021-2022 flu season. This may include regular injectable flu vaccine, high-dose flu vaccine, or LAIV nasal spray (FluMist) vaccine. For more information check <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/healthcareworkers.htm>

What about HCW taking care of immunosuppressed patients?

No precautions for interaction with immunocompromised patients are required following vaccination with any of the injectable influenza vaccine formulations. Inactivated injectable influenza vaccine (IIV) is preferred over LAIV nasal spray (FluMist) for HCW who are in close contact with severely immunosuppressed patients (e.g. stem cell transplant recipients) when they require protective isolation.

What about HCW who have egg allergy?

Persons with a history of egg allergy who have experienced only hives after exposure to egg should receive flu vaccine. Any licensed and recommended flu vaccine (i.e., any form of IIV or recombinant influenza vaccine (RIV)) that is otherwise appropriate for the recipient's age and health status may be used.

Persons who report having had reactions to egg involving symptoms other than hives, such as angioedema, respiratory distress, lightheadedness, or recurrent emesis; or who required epinephrine or another emergency medical intervention, may similarly receive any licensed and recommended flu vaccine (i.e., any form of IIV or RIV) that is otherwise appropriate for the recipient's age and health status. The selected vaccine should be administered in an inpatient or outpatient medical setting (including, but not necessarily limited to hospitals, clinics, health departments, and physician offices). Vaccine administration should be supervised by a health care provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic conditions.

Are there any contraindications to getting a flu vaccine?

A previous severe allergic reaction to flu vaccine, regardless of the component suspected of being responsible for the reaction, is a contraindication to future receipt of the vaccine. Health care workers who do not get vaccinated for influenza must wear a mask.

Which takes precedence, Amador County Health Officer order or state laws regarding influenza and HCW?

This Health Officer order is in addition to State laws regarding influenza and HCW. California Health & Safety code §120175 authorizes Health Officers to control contagious, infectious, or communicable disease and may "take measures as may be necessary" to prevent and control

the spread of disease within their jurisdiction. Facilities must comply with the Health Officer order as well as the applicable State laws regarding influenza vaccine and HCW.

For instance, State law requires that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccinations to employees. If employees decline vaccination, they are required to sign a declination statement in lieu of vaccination. A violation of these provisions (by the employer) is punishable as a misdemeanor. (CA Health and Safety Code, 1288.7, effective January 1, 2007, and Aerosol Transmissible Diseases standard of Cal OSHA, effective September 1, 2010).

Beginning January, 2013, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) required acute care hospitals to report HCW influenza vaccination rates as part of its Hospital Inpatient Quality Reporting Program. These numbers are available to the public.

Does reporting vaccination status violate HIPAA?

Reporting vaccination status to an employer for the purposes of complying with a vaccination policy is not a violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule because compliance is a condition of employment and has been legally mandated by the Health Officer.

How should a health care facility track and identify who has received the influenza vaccine?

A strategy to track and clearly identify which HCW have received the influenza vaccine for the 2021-2022 season is highly recommended, but the specific approach will be determined by each facility.

Is the Public Health Department going to conduct audits of healthcare facilities to ensure compliance with the order?

No. This order is a tool that supports local healthcare organizations and facilities to require employees to comply with specific public health measures. Development of policies and procedures for employee vaccination is up to each organization or facility. This order will not be “enforced” by the Public Health Department in the traditional sense.

How is this order different from an influenza vaccination declination policy?

State law currently requires that certain health care facilities offer influenza vaccination to employees. Employees that decline vaccination are **only** required to sign a declination statement in lieu of vaccination. While compliance rates with these laws are high, actual HCW vaccination rates are not and may be below that required to create effective immunity within the workforce to suppress the spread of infection.

What else can we do to prevent illness?

In addition to vaccination, important actions that we should all take throughout the year are:

1. When ill, stay home from work or school or other public spaces;
2. When you cough or sneeze, do so into your arm at the elbow;
3. Wash your hands often.