



Vaccination of Health Care Workers for Influenza

Date: October 2, 2017
To: Sonoma County Health Care Providers, Hospitals, Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs) Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFEs), Residential Facilities for the Developmentally Disabled, and Dialysis Centers.
From: Karen Milman, MD, MPH, Health Officer
Re: Requirement for Influenza Vaccination of Certain HealthCare Workers in Sonoma County

The 2017 - 2018 flu season is approaching and we, as healthcare leaders in Sonoma County need to continue our work to minimize the spread of communicable disease, provide outstanding health care for our citizens and keep our healthcare work force healthy. As Health Officer for Sonoma County, I am reissuing the Health Officer Order mandating certain health care facilities in Sonoma County implement programs that require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive an annual influenza vaccination, or, if they decline, to wear a mask during every influenza season while working in patient care areas. For the purposes of this Order, **influenza season is defined as November 1st to April 30th**. The order applies to hospitals, skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), residential care facilities for the elderly (RCFEs), residential facilities for the developmentally disabled, and dialysis centers. **This order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded or modified.**

In addition, I strongly recommend that health care workers in outpatient care and other health settings be vaccinated.

Background Information: Influenza infection affects 5-15% of the US population every year, leading to an estimated 3.1 million days of hospitalization and 31.4 million outpatient visits. HCWs are both at risk for influenza and can transmit the virus to their patients and coworkers. Vaccination of HCWs reduces HCW infection and absenteeism, prevents illness and mortality in their patients, and results in financial savings to families and to the health care system. Healthy People 2020 objectives target a 90 percent seasonal influenza vaccination rate for all health care personnel.

State law (CA Health & Safety Code §1288.7 and §5199 Aerosol Transmissible Diseases standard of Cal OSHA) requires that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccination to employees. If employees decline vaccination, they 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 the level that will reduce the spread of infection in our health care facilities. Mandatory vaccination or masking policies have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates to above 95%. After our first year of mandating these programs in Sonoma County, overall HCW flu vaccination rates in SNFs increased from 59% to 85%.

My goal is to protect both HCWs and patients from influenza disease, hospitalization and death by increasing rates of influenza vaccination of HCWs and reducing HCW-to-patient transmission of influenza and vice versa.

Order: As the Health Officer for Sonoma County, I am requiring that each and every health care facility in Sonoma County, of the types specified below, implement a program requiring its health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination, and if they decline, to wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season while working in patient care areas of that health care facility.

Duration: **This order is ongoing and applies to each and every influenza season unless the order is rescinded or modified.** The influenza season is defined as November 1st through April 30th of the following year. In any given year, if surveillance data demonstrates an unusual time course, I may modify the period during which the masking requirement will apply for that season.

Facilities subject to the Order: This order applies to hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, residential care facilities for the elderly, residential facilities for the developmentally disabled, and dialysis centers.

Definition of a Health Care Worker: For the purpose of this order, “health care workers” are persons, paid or unpaid, who work in the above specified health care facilities, and have direct patient contact or work in patient care areas.

I thank you for your assistance in working with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services to make Sonoma County a healthier community. To assist with your vaccination programs, we have developed a Frequently Asked Questions document which is available at: www.sonoma-county.org/flu.

If you have questions, please call Karen Holbrook, MD, MPH, Deputy Health Officer, or Mary Miller, RN, Director of Sonoma County Public Health Disease Control at 565-4567.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'K. Milman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Milman MD MPH
Sonoma County Health Officer