



Public Health Administration

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Health Officer Order Regarding Influenza Vaccination of Health Care Workers Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

On September 18, 2014, Maxwell Ohikhuare, M.D., San Bernardino County Health Officer, issued an [influenza vaccination order](#) to all County healthcare workers. This order still remains in effect, is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless rescinded.

Why is the influenza vaccination and masking order needed?

Influenza is a disease with serious impact, and the most effective method of preventing influenza infection is vaccination. Health Care Workers (HCWs) often care for patients who are at increased risk of exposure to influenza. Infected HCWs can transmit influenza to patients and coworkers before they are symptomatic. Mandatory influenza vaccination or masking policies have increased HCW vaccination rates to greater than 95%.

Which takes precedence, the San Bernardino County Health Officer's order or state laws regarding influenza and HCWs?

The Health Officer's order is *in addition to* State laws regarding influenza and HCWs. California Health & Safety Code 120175 authorizes the Health Officer to mitigate contagious, infectious, or communicable disease and "take measures as may be necessary" to prevent and control the spread of disease within their jurisdiction. Facilities must comply with the mandatory flu order as well as the applicable State laws regarding influenza vaccine and HCWs. For instance, under State Law, acute care hospitals will still be required to report their HCW influenza vaccination rate to the California Department of Public Health, and they will also be required to implement this order.

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 required to sign a declination statement and adhere to the facilities plan to prevent on-site HCW from contracting and/or transmitting the influenza virus. This plan may include the requirement to wear a mask during the influenza season, or reassigning work activities.

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DEFINITIONS

Which facilities are affected by the influenza vaccination and masking order?

The vaccination and masking order applies to all licensed health care facilities in San Bernardino County. To include but not limited to:

- Acute Psychiatric Hospital
- Adult Day Health Center
- Alternative Birthing Center
- Chemical Dependency Recovery Hospital
- Chronic Dialysis Clinic
- Community Clinic Or Free Clinic
- Congregate Living Health Facility
- Correctional Treatment Center
- District Hospital With <100 Beds
- Emergency Medical Service Providers
- General Acute Care Hospital
- Home Health Agency
- Hospice
- Intermediate Care Facility
- Intermediate Care Facility – Developmentally Disabled
- Intermediate Care Facility – Developmentally Disabled – Habilitative
- Intermediate Care Facility – Developmentally Disabled - Nursing
- Pediatric Day Health Respite Care
- Psychology Clinic
- Referral Agency
- Rehabilitation Clinic
- Skilled Nursing Facility
- Special Hospital
- Surgical Clinic

For more information and definitions of licensed health care facilities, see California Health & Safety Code Sections 1200-1209 and 1250-1264. <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes.xhtml>

Who is considered a health care worker?

For the purpose of this order, a health care worker is defined as a person, paid or unpaid, working for a licensed health care settings and has direct patient contact. A person working for a licensed home health agency or hospice who works in patient homes would be considered a health care worker with direct patient contact.

When is influenza season?

Influenza season is defined as the period of November 1 to March 31 of the following year. The Health Officer may extend the mandatory masking period if surveillance data demonstrate an unusually late peak and continued widespread influenza activity. HCWs should be offered influenza vaccine before influenza season as it can take up to two weeks to develop protection.

What kind of mask should be used? When should masks be changed, replaced, or discarded?

The term “mask” in this order refers to a surgical mask. Please check with your facility about details of the implementation of this order including specifications of type of mask and how often to change masks.

What is considered a patient care area?

Any area with direct patient contact. This may include, but not limited to: the facility, patient’s home or other designated area. Please check with your facility about details of the implementation of this order including facility specific patient care areas.

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

Health care workers that do not get vaccinated for influenza, whether declined or due to a medical exemption must wear a mask during influenza season while working in patient care areas.

FLU VACCINE

What kind of flu vaccine HCWs receive?

Nasal spray vaccine should **not** be used. There are multiple flu vaccines available with varying indications and ways to give them. Within specified age indications, there are no recommendations for any given flu vaccine over another. There are inactivated vaccines and live attenuated vaccines, and two ways to give them: intramuscular (in the muscle) or intradermal (in the skin). See seasonal influenza vaccination resources for health professionals: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/index.htm>

What about HCWs taking care of immunosuppressed patients?

HCWs who are caring for severely immunosuppressed patients who require a protective environment (e.g. bone marrow transplant unit) should be vaccinated, as these patients are at greater risk of severe influenza illness and complications.

What about HCWs who have egg allergy?

Please refer to the August 25, 2017 issue of the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) for more information about influenza vaccine and egg allergy: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/rr/rr6602a1.htm>

Current CDC recommendations state that persons who experience only hives after exposure to egg can safely receive influenza vaccine and that any licensed and recommended influenza vaccine appropriate for the person’s age and health status can be used. Persons who have had reactions other than hives (lightheadedness, angioedema, recurrent vomiting, etc.) should receive flu vaccine in an inpatient or outpatient medical setting, supervised by a health care provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic reactions.

If a HCW cannot receive influenza vaccine due to a medical condition, then the HCW must wear a mask during influenza season while working in patient care areas.

Should a HCW who is immunocompromised or has a chronic health condition (asthma, diabetes, etc.) receive influenza vaccine?

Yes, HCWs in these groups are considered a priority group that should get yearly influenza vaccination as they are at greater risk of severe influenza illness and complications. HCWs in these groups should check with their primary care providers to determine which kind of flu vaccine they should get.

Should a HCW who is pregnant receive influenza vaccine?

Yes, the influenza shot is safe and should be given to pregnant women during any trimester. Pregnant women are another group that should be prioritized if vaccine supply is limited. Pregnant women and their newborn can benefit from influenza vaccination as both are at greater risk of severe influenza illness and complications. By California law, pregnant women should receive preservative-free influenza vaccine available as prefilled syringes and single dose vials.