

PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

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# Health Officer Order

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## Enhanced Precautions for Healthcare Workers and Healthcare Facilities During Winter Respiratory Illness Season

This document contains hyperlinks and can be accessed on our [Health Bulletin webpage](https://kernpublichealth.com/health-bulletin/)  
(<https://kernpublichealth.com/health-bulletin/>)

September 25, 2024

Dear Kern County Healthcare Provider:

To lower the risk of transmission of influenza and other respiratory illness to patients in healthcare facilities within our county during the winter respiratory illness season, I am issuing this Health Officer Order to mandate that all healthcare facilities implement a winter respiratory illness prevention program.

### Background

In order to reflect the variety of respiratory illnesses that tend to increase in circulation during the winter months, what has historically been called “flu season” is now referred to as winter respiratory illness season.

Healthcare workers are at higher risk of contracting respiratory infections that circulate during the winter respiratory illness season, like influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), than the general population. California Code of Regulations, Title, 8 Section 5199 describes the Cal/OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Disease Standard. This requires employers to protect employees who are at increased risk of contracting certain airborne infections due to their work activities.

Persons with certain respiratory conditions may be infectious even before they develop symptoms. Since healthcare workers are likely to come in contact with persons at high risk for complications related to those circulating respiratory infections, such as young children, pregnant women, elderly, persons with weakened immune systems, and persons with chronic health conditions, it remains important to reduce the risk of transmission to those patients. Enhanced precautions during winter respiratory illness season protects patients, reduces employee absenteeism during the season, and results in financial savings to our community and healthcare system.

### ORDER

Pursuant to my authority under California Health and Safety Code §120175, for the purpose of limiting the spread of respiratory illnesses in healthcare settings during the winter respiratory illness season, I hereby order every healthcare facility subject to the Aerosol Transmissible Diseases Standard within the County of Kern to implement a winter respiratory illness prevention program. This program is intended to work in conjunction with the Aerosol Transmissible Diseases Standard described in California Code of Regulations, Title 8 Section 5199. This order was effective [September 25, 2023](#),

*Grounded in Health*

PHSU 2402

is ongoing and applies to each winter respiratory illness season unless the order is rescinded or modified. This order replaces the past the Health Officer Order originally issued on [August 6, 2018](#) and most recently reissued on [September 7, 2022](#).

A winter respiratory illness prevention program may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Offering vaccination against respiratory illnesses listed in in [§5199 Appendix E](#) and CDC's [Recommended Vaccines for Healthcare Workers](#),
- Enhanced cleaning and sanitization measures, including more frequent cleaning,
- Wider availability and use of personal protective equipment,
- Symptom screening of staff and visitors,
- Source control of symptomatic patients,
- Limitations to visitors, such as the age or number of visitors,
- Offering telehealth services where applicable,
- Additional training and educating staff.

California Code of Regulations §5199 (c)(6)(D) requires hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccination to staff. Healthcare workers who decline to receive a recommend vaccination must sign a declination form in accordance with §5199(h)(5)(E) and facilities must maintain this documentation. Staff who initial decline but later request to receive a recommend vaccination will be offered the vaccination, as long as the vaccine is available.

Recommended vaccinations are intended to be preventative and must be offered in a timely manner; for example, it is strongly recommended that vaccination against seasonal influenza should be received prior to the start of the winter respiratory illness season. Staff who initially decline but later request to receive a recommended vaccination shall be offered that vaccination, as long as the vaccine is available.

When recommended by the California Department of Public Health, healthcare workers who are exposed to certain infectious respiratory pathogens and are not known or presumed to be immune to that specific infectious agent must be excluded or restricted from the workplace.

Respiratory protection continues to be required in accordance with Subsection §5199(g)(4) and may be required in additional situations or when performing additional types of tasks.

#### Definition of Healthcare Workers and Healthcare Facilities

For the purpose of this order “healthcare workers” are all persons, paid or unpaid, working in healthcare facilities. This includes, but is not limited to, physicians, nurses, medical assistants, clerical staff, dietary/food services workers, janitorial/environmental staff, building services/engineering staff, employees, contractors, students, and volunteers. This also includes medical first responders such as paramedics and emergency medical technicians. Healthcare facilities include, but are not limited to, acute care hospitals, urgent care centers, surgical centers, skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities, dialysis centers, community clinics, private medical offices, psychiatric facilities, emergency medical services and medical transport, home health agencies, and hospice facilities.

Winter Respiratory Illness Season

The winter respiratory season is designated as November 1 through April 30 of the following year. In any given year, if respiratory surveillance data demonstrate unusually early and/or late respiratory illness activity, the winter respiratory illness season may begin earlier or extend later in the year.

The Kern County Public Health Department shares with the county's healthcare professionals and facilities the goal that our community receives safe and effective care. We trust that all healthcare facilities will comply fully with this Health Officer Order and will notify their healthcare workers of its provisions. The role that healthcare workers play in preventing illness and mortality related to winter respiratory illness is invaluable.

If you have any questions, please contact KCPH by phone at 661-321-3000, via email at [publichealth@kerncounty.com](mailto:publichealth@kerncounty.com), or visit the [KCPH website](#).

Thank you,

*Kristopher Lyon, MD*  
Kristopher Lyon, MD  
Health Officer