

## **Influenza Vaccination or Masking Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Why did Kern County issue a Health Officer Order for Influenza Vaccination or Masking?**

The national goal for influenza vaccination among health care workers is 90%. Only one hospital in Kern County met that goal during the 2016-2017 influenza season. Local data indicates that hospitals with a mandatory influenza vaccination or masking policies saw vaccination coverage in their facilities increase by an average of 29% since the 2013-2014 influenza season. In comparison, hospitals without mandatory influenza vaccination or masking policies saw an average increase of 4%.

**Why is the influenza season November 1 through April 30?** Influenza viruses typically circulate in the United States during this time. For consistency across California, local health officers have been asked to use a standardized time frame for influenza season. The influenza season may begin earlier or extend later in the year depending on local influenza surveillance data.

**Why does the Health Officer Order include so many different types of facilities?** Health care, ideally, is an integrated system. Including all health care facilities and all health care workers in the Health Officer's Order provides continuity of protection no matter where patients/clients interact with our health care system.

### **Why does the Health Officer Order include so many different types of health care workers?**

Any person who works in a health care facility may come in contact with patients/clients. They are therefore at increased risk of contracting influenza and increased risk of transmitting influenza to high risk patients/clients. In addition to protecting patients/clients, the Health Officer Order is intended to protect our health care workforce. Every health care worker is important to maintain an effective health care system, not just those with direct patient contact.

**Is my facility included in the Health Officer Order?** Any facility that sees patients/clients for any kind of health care need is included in the Health Officer Order. Health care needs include mental and behavior health, physical therapy, and rehabilitation services, in addition to medical care. While there are exceptions, any facility that has an Aerosol Transmissible Diseases (ATD) policy, a Blood-borne Pathogen (BBP) policy, sharps policy, or policies regarding the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) is highly likely to be a health care facility.

### **I work at a health facility but I do not see patients/clients. Am I still considered a health care worker?**

Any person who enters a health care facility in any working capacity is a health care worker. This includes persons who do not provide direct patient care or have direct contact with patients. This includes persons who are not directly employed by the health care facility (contractors, volunteers, etc.).

**I do not have direct patient contact and work in an area away from patients. Do I still have to be vaccinated or wear a mask?** If health care services are provided anywhere in the building, the entire building is the health care facility and any person working within it is a health care worker. This includes all floors, wings, units, and subsections of a building. This includes areas such as the lobby, waiting room, pharmacy, laboratory, dining room/cafeteria, and store room.

**I work for a health care facility but my office is a separate building where there are no patients. Do I still have to be vaccinated or wear a mask?** If no health care services are provided in the building, no patients/clients visit that building, and the building is physically separated (no connecting indoor walkways), this building would not be considered part of the health care facility. The Health Officer Order would not apply to persons working in the detached building. Keep in mind, however, that if a person in the detached building enters the health care facility for any reason during the influenza season (rounds, meetings, retrieve supplies, etc.), that person becomes a health care worker in a health care facility and the Health Officer Order applies.

For example, the Health Officer Order applies to those working in a skilled nursing facility and assisted living facility. The Health Officer Order does not apply to those working exclusively in the independent living facility, provided the independent living facility is in a separate physical building and the workers do not enter the skilled nursing facility or assisted living facility.

**Is the health care facility required to pay for the cost of vaccination or provide respiratory masks for its health care workers?** Many health care facilities are included in California Code of Regulations Section 5199. Pursuant to subsections (c)(6)(D), (h)(10), and Appendix C2, the health care facility is responsible for offering influenza vaccination at no cost to the health care worker and providing respiratory masks for health care workers who decline vaccination.

**I have an egg allergy and cannot get the flu vaccine. Does the Health Officer Order apply to me?** Yes. Since the 2016-2017 influenza season, the CDC has advised that people with egg allergies can receive any licensed, recommended age-appropriate influenza vaccine. People with severe egg allergies should be vaccinated in a medical setting and be supervised by a health care provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic conditions. Alternately, there is an egg-free vaccine, Flublok, which is FDA approved for use in adults 18 years and over. This influenza season, for the first time, the Kern County Public Health Services Department will have a small amount of this vaccine available.

**I have a doctor's note stating that I cannot get the influenza vaccination. Does the Health Officer Order still apply to me?** Yes. Anyone who does not receive the annual influenza vaccination must wear a respiratory mask while in the health care facility.

**Does the mask have to be an N-95 mask?** No. A respiratory/surgical mask is sufficient for general use in the vaccination or masking policy. An N-95 mask should always be used if aerosol transmissible diseases are suspected or confirmed.

**If I decline the influenza vaccination, how long do I have to wear a respiratory mask?** Health care workers who decline influenza vaccination must wear a mask for the entirety of their working day while providing services in or on behalf of the health care facility for the duration of the influenza season. For example, if a declining health care worker leaves the health care facility to provide health care services at another location (e.g. home visit, community care setting), they must still wear a mask.

**Does the Health Department offer influenza vaccinations?** Yes. The Kern County Public Health Services Department does have a limited supply of influenza vaccine that is available to all members of the community. These are administered on a first come, first served basis. Appointments are recommended. Please call (661) 321-3000 to make an appointment at one of our clinics. Please make sure to retain a copy of your vaccination for your health care facility and personal records.

**Are influenza vaccinations at the Health Department free?** No, influenza vaccinations at the Kern County Public Health Services Department clinic are not free. Some people may qualify for reduced cost vaccinations. Most insurances are accepted.

**Are there free options for influenza vaccination?** Possibly. There may be opportunities to receive the influenza vaccination throughout the community free of charge as a general member of the public. Please make sure to retain a copy of your vaccination for your health care facility and personal records.

**Are there corporate options for influenza vaccination?** Yes. There are various companies that provide influenza vaccinations in the facility/office setting. Please consult your administration to determine if this option is right for you or your facility.

**I still have questions. Who do I contact?** Please call the Kern County Public Health Services Department at (661) 321-3000.