
Health Officer Order

Mandatory Influenza Vaccination or Masking of Kern County Health Care Workers During Influenza Season

August 26, 2019

Dear Kern County Health Care Provider:

In order to lower the risk of transmission of influenza to patients in health care facilities within our county, I am issuing this Health Officer Order to mandate that all health care facilities implement a program requiring its health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination prior to the influenza season; or if they decline, to wear a respiratory mask for the duration of the influenza season while working within the health care facility.

Background

Kern County acute care facilities with mandatory influenza vaccination or masking policies have seen vaccination coverage increase by an average 39% since the 2013-2014 influenza season, while acute care facilities without a mandatory influenza vaccination or masking policy have seen an increase of only 4%. At an overall 76% vaccination rate in acute care facilities, Kern County is not on track to meet the Healthy People 2020 goal of 90% vaccination rate among healthcare workers. Persons infected with influenza can be contagious before the onset of symptoms so staying home when ill is not sufficient to prevent spread of this infection. Health care workers are at higher risk for contracting influenza than the general population and health care workers are likely to come in contact with persons at high risk for complications of influenza such as young children, pregnant women, elderly, persons with weakened immune systems, and persons with chronic health conditions. Influenza vaccination of health care workers protects patients, reduces employee absenteeism during the influenza season, and results in financial savings to our community and health care system.

Notification of the intent to issue a Health Officer Order regarding influenza vaccination or respiratory masking was announced in the Health Bulletin distributed on November 6, 2017. The Health Officer Order was issued on August 6, 2018 with an update to the influenza season dates published on September 24, 2018. As mentioned in the Health Officer Order, the order is ongoing and applies to each influenza unless the order is rescinded or modified. The order is being reissued during the 2019-2020 influenza season for clarification purposes.

State law requires general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccination to employees. If employees decline vaccination, they are required to sign a declination statement in lieu of vaccination. (California Health & Safety Code, §1288.7, subd. (a); 8 California Code of Regulation, §5199, subd. (c)(6)(D) and (h)(10)). This order is in addition to existing state law.

ORDER

Pursuant to my authority under California Health and Safety Code §120175, for the purpose of limiting the spread of influenza, I hereby order every health care facility within the County of Kern to implement a program requiring health care

workers receive an annual influenza vaccination for the current season prior to the start of the influenza season. Health care workers who decline to receive the annual influenza vaccination must wear a respiratory mask for the duration of the influenza season while working within the health care facility. Verifiable documentation that annual influenza vaccination was received outside the health care facility (e.g. pharmacy) is acceptable. This order was effective August 6, 2018, is ongoing, and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded or modified.

It is also recommended that health care administrators adopt an easy way to identify the health care workers who have received their annual influenza vaccine in order to enforce the vaccination or masking policy. One such way is to place a sticker on the health care worker's badge following vaccination.

Definition of Health Care Workers and Health Care Facilities

For the purpose of this order "health care workers" are all persons, paid or unpaid, working in health care 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. Health care 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.

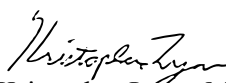
Influenza Season

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

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

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

Thank you for your commitment to the health of our community.


Kristopher Lyon, MD
Interim Health Officer