

TEHAMA COUNTY HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 4, 2019

TO: Hospitals, Ambulatory and Community Clinics, Medical Practices, Skilled Nursing and other Long Term Care Facilities and other Health Care Facilities

FROM: Richard Wickenheiser, MD
Health Officer, Tehama County *R. Wickenheiser, MD*

SUBJECT: **HEALTH OFFICER ORDER NO. 12-01:** Mandatory Influenza Vaccination or Masking of Health Care Workers During the 2019/2020 Influenza Season

Order

Pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 120175:

- Each and every health care facility in Tehama County is hereby **ORDERED** to implement a program requiring all health care workers providing services at the facility to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask for the duration of the 2019/2020 influenza season (defined below) while working in patient care areas in that health care facility.
- Every health care facility shall promptly provide a copy of this Order to each health care worker providing services at the facility and shall further post a copy of this Order in a prominent and accessible location in the facility for the duration of the 2019/2020 influenza season.

Background and Reasons for the Order

In response to the previous six year's flu mandates, Tehama County has had good results in increasing the flu vaccination rate in healthcare workers. Most healthcare facilities were 100% compliant with this mandate. I am again issuing a Health Officer order mandating that all health care facilities in Tehama County require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask during the influenza season.

Influenza is a highly communicable disease that exists in our community at all times at varying levels. Influenza infection rates and the severity of influenza symptoms increase markedly during the winter months, commonly known as "flu season," necessitating that additional measures be taken during those months to prevent the spread of the disease.

Influenza infection accounts for an estimated 36,000 excess deaths in the US each year; 90% of which are in persons > 65 years of age. HCWs are both at risk for influenza and can transmit the virus to their vulnerable patients. Influenza outbreaks have occurred on a yearly basis in our County. Many of the patients have followed our advice and have been immunized but unfortunately often their health care workers are not. This has led to direct transmission from the unimmunized health care workers to additional patients.

Influenza vaccination of HCWs protects patients and reduces employee absenteeism during influenza season. State law only requires that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccinations to employees. If hospital employees decline vaccination, they are only required to sign a declination statement in lieu of vaccination. (Health & Safety Code, §1288.7, subdivision (a); California Code of Regulations, title 8, § 5199, subdivision (c)(6)(D) and (h)(10).) While compliance rates with these laws are high, actual HCW vaccination rates are not and may be below that which would reduce the spread of infection. Mandatory vaccination or masking policies have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates to >95%.

Our goals are to increase rates of influenza vaccination of HCWs, reduce employee absenteeism during influenza season and reduce HCW to patient transmission of influenza.

Facilities Subject to the Order

This order applies to hospitals, ambulatory and community clinics, skilled nursing and other long term care facilities, and any other health care facility.

Definition of HCWs

For the purposes of this order, "health care workers" or "HCWs" are persons, paid and unpaid, working in health care settings who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas.

Duration of Order

This Order applies to the 2019/2020 influenza season unless rescinded. The influenza season is defined as November 1, 2019 to April 30, 2020. If influenza surveillance data demonstrate an unusually late peak and continued widespread influenza activity in the spring, I may issue a subsequent order extending the period during which the masking program shall apply.

Compliance

Compliance with this Order is **mandatory** for all health care facilities in the incorporated and unincorporated areas of Tehama County. Violation may result in civil enforcement or criminal penalties under Division 105 and/or Division 112 of the Health and Safety Code.

If a health care worker receives their influenza vaccination after November 1st, the health care worker will need to wear a mask for two weeks after their immunization while antibodies develop in the body.

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of Tehama County. For any additional questions or if you have any objections to this Order, please contact the Tehama County Health Services Agency Public Health Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Program at 530.527.6824.

cc: Board of Supervisors
Bill Goodwin