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Health Alert

November 2, 2020

Mandatory Influenza Vaccination of Health Care Workers

Current Situation

As Health Officers for Alameda County and the City of Berkeley, we are issuing an updated joint Health Officer order ([originally issued Aug. 28, 2013](#)) mandating all licensed health care facilities, residential care facilities, and locked psychiatric facilities in Alameda County and the City of Berkeley must implement a program requiring their Health Care Workers (HCWs) to receive an influenza vaccine for each influenza season. The Influenza Season dates are defined as November 1 to April 30 of the following year. [This order](#) is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless rescinded or modified.

The purpose of this Order is to protect the health of HCWs, patients, and the broader community. During the COVID-19 pandemic it remains a top priority for HCWs to be vaccinated against the influenza virus. The overlap in symptoms of these diseases accompanied by the lack of effective treatment for COVID-19 requires additional public health intervention.

Background Information

Influenza infection affects 5-15% of the US population every year, leading to an estimated 3.1 million days of hospitalization and 31.4 million outpatient visits. HCWs are both at risk for influenza and can transmit the virus to their patients and coworkers. Patients in our healthcare facilities are particularly vulnerable to influenza. Young children, the pregnant, the elderly, and those with chronic health conditions are at greater risk for influenza-related hospitalization and death.

In your role as a health care provider and ours as Health Officers, we share common goals: reduce spread of serious diseases such as influenza, provide outstanding health care, and protect our HCWs. State law requires that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccinations to employees. If employees decline vaccination, they are only required to sign a declination statement in lieu of vaccination. While compliance rates with these laws are high, actual HCW vaccination rates are not and may be below the level that will reduce the spread of infection in our health care facilities. Mandatory vaccination policies have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates to above 95%. After our first year of mandating these policies in Alameda County and Berkeley, overall HCW flu vaccination rates increased from 72% to 86% in acute care inpatient facilities, and continue to remain around 87-89%. Healthy People 2020 objectives target a 90 percent seasonal influenza vaccination rate for all health care personnel, thus we still have improvements to make.



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Our goals are to protect both patients and HCWs from influenza disease, hospitalization and death by increasing rates of influenza vaccination of HCWs and reducing HCW-to-patient transmission of influenza and vice versa.

Order:

We, as the Health Officers of Alameda County and the City of Berkeley, require that each and every licensed health care facility, residential care facility, and locked psychiatric facility in Alameda County and the City of Berkeley implement a program requiring their health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination.

Duration of Order

This order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded or modified. The influenza season is defined as November 1 to April 30 of the following year (the end date was extended to April 30th as of 2017). In any given year, if influenza surveillance data demonstrate an unusually late peak and continued widespread influenza activity in the spring, we may extend the period during which the program shall apply for that year.

Facilities Subject to the Order

This Order applies to all health care and specified congregate facilities and EMS providers, including but not limited to hospitals, skilled nursing and other long-term care facilities, outpatient medical clinics, hospice, dialysis centers, and home health agencies. This Order applies to all facilities regardless of documented HCW influenza vaccination rate.

Definition of HCWs

For 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. In the hospital setting this includes all paid and unpaid persons working on hospital campus settings (including off-site locations) including but not limited to staff, physicians, volunteers, students, contracted employees, registration, and vendors. In addition to medical personnel these terms include dentists, chiropractors, and physical therapists, and each of their staff members that have contact with patients.

This Order mandates that health care facilities implement a process for requiring HCW to receive vaccination unless an HCW can produce sufficient documentation to obtain a medical exemption. Unlike in previous years, mask wearing is not an adequate substitution for vaccination under this Order.



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We appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of our community. For any additional questions in Berkeley, please contact the City of Berkeley, Public Health Division, Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit (510) 981-5292. For any additional questions elsewhere in Alameda County, please contact the Alameda County Public Health Department, Division of Communicable Disease Control and Prevention at 510-267-3230.

Please distribute to all providers in your practice