



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY


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Health Officer

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 31, 2012

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

FROM: Ira Lubell, MD, MPH
Acting Health Officer 

SUBJECT: Influenza Vaccination or Masking of Health Care Workers During Influenza Season

I am issuing a Health Officer recommendation expecting that all health care facilities in Santa Cruz 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 infections account 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. Even when the patient vaccination rate is near 100%, ill staff can easily introduce influenza into the facility, where it spreads to patients.

Influenza vaccination of HCWs protects patients and reduces employee absenteeism during influenza season. State law requires only that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccinations to employees. (Cal.health & Safety Code, 1288.7, subd. (a); 8 Cal Code Regs., 5199, subd. (c)(6)(D) and (h)(10).) While the

compliance rates with these laws are high, actual HCW vaccination rates are not and may be below that which will blunt the spread of infection. Mandatory vaccination or masking policies have been shown to increase the HCW vaccination rates to >95%.

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

Recommendation

I, as the Acting Health Officer of Santa Cruz County, am recommending that each and every health care facility in Santa Cruz County implement a program requiring its health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season while working in patient care areas in that health care facility.

If your agency is unwilling to comply with this recommendation, notify Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency at 454-4114.

Duration of the Recommendation

This order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded. The influenza season is defined as November 1 to March 31 of the following year. In any given year, if influenza surveillance data demonstrate an unusually late peak and continued widespread influenza activity in the spring, I may extend the period during which the masking program shall apply for the next year.

Facilities Subject to the Recommendation

This recommendation applies to hospital, 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 recommendation, "health care workers" are persons, paid and unpaid, working in healthcare settings who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas.

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of Santa Cruz County. For any additional questions, please contact our Communicable Disease Unit at (831) 454-4114.