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September 3, 2019

TO: Licensed Acute Care Hospitals, Skilled Nursing Facilities, Intermediate Care Facilities, and Emergency Medical Services Provider Agencies in Los Angeles County

FROM: Muntu Davis, M.D., M.P.H. 
Health Officer, Los Angeles County

RE: Expanded Health Officer Order for Annual Influenza Immunization Programs for Healthcare Personnel or Masking of Health Care Personnel during the Influenza Season

To lower the risk of transmission of influenza to patients, I am issuing this updated Health Officer Order to mandate that licensed acute care hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, intermediate care facilities, and emergency medical services (EMS) provider agencies in the County assist their healthcare personnel (HCP) to obtain influenza immunizations by requiring that those HCP who decline immunization wear a mask when they are in contact with patients during the annual influenza season. This Order has been in effect in Los Angeles County since October 2013. It is being expanded for the 2019-2020 influenza season and future influenza seasons to also include EMS healthcare personnel.

Influenza is a highly communicable disease. It exists all year, but infection rates and the severity of symptoms increase markedly during what is commonly called “flu season” in the winter months. Early administration of influenza immunizations is recommended at the beginning of the influenza season to prevent influenza. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that influenza has resulted in 9.2 million to 60.8 million illnesses, between 140,000 to 710,000 hospitalizations, and between 12,000 to 56,000 deaths annually. Unvaccinated HCP are not only at risk for contracting influenza but can also transmit the virus to their coworkers and patients. Patients in healthcare facilities—most especially young children, pregnant women, elderly, and persons with chronic health conditions—are particularly vulnerable to influenza infection and its subsequent complications.

By law, acute care hospitals in California must annually offer free influenza vaccinations on-site to their employees and require all to be vaccinated; any employee who elects not to be vaccinated must provide the hospital with a written declaration that he or she has declined the vaccination [Cal. Health & Safety Code §1288.7(a)]. In addition, occupational safety regulations mandate that many types of health care facilities, including hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, intermediate care facilities and EMS provider agencies make the seasonal influenza vaccine reasonably available to all employees with occupational exposure and ensure that each employee who refuses the vaccine signs a statement declining vaccination [8 Cal. Code Regs. §5199 (c)(6)(D) & (h)(10)].

In Los Angeles County, a Health Officer Order mandating that HCP be either vaccinated or masked in patient-care areas has been issued annually since 2013. Since that time, the average rate of HCP immunization in Los Angeles County has risen from 58% to 83%, but still falls short of the 90% target set by “Healthy People 2020.” Thus, there is a need to continue efforts to increase immunization rates to protect both HCP and the patients they serve.

ORDER: Pursuant to my authority under §120175 of the California Health and Safety Code, for the purpose of limiting the spread of influenza, I hereby order every licensed acute care hospital, skilled nursing facility, intermediate care facility, and emergency medical services provider agency within the County of Los Angeles public health jurisdiction to implement a program under which healthcare personnel receive an annual influenza immunization for the current season or wear a respiratory mask for the duration of the influenza season while in contact with patients or working in patient-care areas.

PERSONS COVERED: For the purposes of this Order, “health care personnel” are all persons, including paid and unpaid employees, contractors, students, volunteers, and EMS healthcare personnel who work in a prehospital setting or in areas where patient care is provided in a licensed facility subject to this Order or who otherwise have direct contact with patients at such a facility or prehospital settings.

DURATION OF ORDER: Until rescinded, this Order applies to each influenza season, defined as November 1 of one year to April 30 of the following year. If surveillance data in a particular year demonstrate that the influenza season is different than November 1 to April 30, this period may be amended by a further order.

REPORTING: If requested by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, facilities must report their HCP influenza immunization rates within the requested timeframe.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health shares with the county’s healthcare professionals and facilities the goal that our population receives safe and effective care. We trust that all facilities and EMS provider agencies subject to this Order will comply fully with it and will notify their HCP of its provisions. We hope that HCP in other facilities, such as physicians’ offices, will follow the strong recommendation that they voluntarily adopt the same protective procedures.

Health Officer Order Resources

For additional information regarding this Health Officer Order, the following documents can be found at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Vaccine Preventable Disease Control Program website at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip/>

- Fact Sheet: Influenza Vaccination for Healthcare Personnel
- Frequently Asked Questions about Influenza Vaccinations

Further questions may be directed to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Vaccine Preventable Disease Control Program at (213) 351-7800 or e-mail to ip@ph.lacounty.gov.

Attachment to this Document: Supporting Rationale for Requiring Influenza Vaccination or Masking for Healthcare Personnel