



For Immediate Release:

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Health Officer Issues Order to Vaccinate Healthcare Personnel Against the Flu

Mandatory flu shots protect healthcare personnel and their patients

LOS ANGELES – Los Angeles County Health Officer and Public Health Director, Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, has issued an order mandating that healthcare personnel in each licensed acute care hospital, skilled nursing facility, and intermediate care facility in Los Angeles County receive an annual vaccination against influenza, or wear a protective mask. The order applies to all individuals working in these settings who have direct patient contact or work in patient areas and defines the flu season as November 1 through March 31. The order excludes facilities in the cities of Long Beach and Pasadena, which are separate health jurisdictions.

“Getting vaccinated is one of the most important steps that health care personnel can take to protect their patients and themselves from the flu,” said Dr. Fielding. “Flu vaccines prevent illness among healthcare personnel and there is growing evidence that it reduces the chance of patients, many of whom are at higher risk for flu complications, becoming infected. Thus, this flu vaccination mandate supports healthcare personnel’s commitment to keeping patients safe from preventable harm.”

Under the California Health and Safety Code (§120175), the Health Officer has the legal authority to issue orders to prevent and control contagious diseases to protect the health of the public. Influenza is a highly communicable disease. It exists all year, but infection rates and the severity of symptoms increase during what is commonly called the “flu season” during the winter months. Health care personnel are not only at risk for 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 infection and its subsequent complications. Influenza is a major cause of serious illness and death that accounts for up to 200,000 hospitalizations, and an average of 24,000 deaths in the U.S. each year, according to the CDC.

In California, several policies are in place to encourage flu vaccination among health care personnel. These include a California law, a Joint Commission standard, and the Cal/OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Disease Standard, all of which require selected health care providers to offer influenza vaccines to employees at no charge. Despite these policies, as well as efforts to educate personnel and provide easy access to vaccinations onsite, healthcare worker flu vaccination rates remain low. During the 2011-2012 flu season, an estimated one-third of healthcare personnel in the U.S. remained unvaccinated against influenza.

“Our goal is to close the gap between the current vaccination rate and our national standard of 90%, and this mandate offers our best chance to achieve this,” said Dr. Fielding. “Health care personnel mandates have been shown to greatly increase immunization rates. For instance, in the



2011-2012 flu season, 95% of healthcare personnel working in U.S. hospitals that required influenza vaccination were vaccinated, compared to 68% of personnel in hospitals that did not require vaccination. We expect this mandate to lead to similar results in Los Angeles County.”

Los Angeles County joins a growing number of public health stakeholders who support mandatory vaccination policies as an effective means of protecting personnel and patients from the flu. Mandates have been adopted by Alameda, Contra Costa, Sacramento and several other California counties; endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, and National Association of City and County Health Officials; and adopted by more than 30 Los Angeles area hospitals, including all LA County Department of Health Service facilities.

For more information regarding the Health Officer Order mandating influenza vaccinations for healthcare personnel, visit the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Immunization Program website at http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip/flu_order.htm.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises nearly 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: @LAPublicHealth.

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