

## **Health Advisory for Calaveras County Medical Providers August 12, 2014**

### **Advisory**

This Advisory is issued jointly from the Health Officers of Calaveras, Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties mandating that all licensed health care facilities in Calaveras, Tuolumne and Mariposa counties require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive an annual influenza vaccination, or, if they decline, to wear a surgical mask during every influenza season (defined as November 1 to March 31 of the following year) while working in patient care areas. This order is issued pursuant to Health & Safety Code §120175 and applies to all clinics as defined in Health and Safety Codes §§ 1200 – 1205.5 and all health facilities as defined in Health and Safety Codes §§ 1250 – 1264, except that this order shall not apply to clinics or facilities that solely provide psychiatric, mental health, behavioral, or chemical dependency treatment services. This order is effective August 12, 2014, and is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded or modified. The order shall be enforced in each jurisdiction by the Health Officer appointed in that jurisdiction.

### **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 million outpatient visits. HCWs are both at risk for influenza and can transmit the virus to their patients and coworkers. Patients in our health care 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. Healthy People 2020 objectives target a 90 percent seasonal influenza vaccination rate for all health care personnel.

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. Policies requiring either vaccination or masking have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates to above 95%.<sup>1</sup> Sierra foothill and mountain counties have some of the highest rates of vaccine declination in the state. As healthcare professionals we must model responsible vaccination practices for our communities, and keeping up with annual influenza immunization recommendations is one way to do this.

Due to the nature of the influenza virus, development and implementation of the influenza vaccine is problematic. Challenged by the ephemeral nature of the agent, annual vaccine effectiveness hinges significantly upon how well matched the components of any given vaccine are to the predominant strains. Nevertheless, many new influenza vaccine products are now available and the vaccine remains our most effective tool against the pathogen. Our goals are to protect both patients and Health Care Workers from influenza disease, hospitalization and death by increasing rates of influenza vaccination of Health Care Workers.

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<sup>1</sup> Survey of Influenza Vaccine Coverage Among Health Care Workers in Skilled Nursing Facilities; March, 2013

Recent research has highlighted the risks and benefits of influenza vaccination.<sup>2</sup> Studies have suggested that masking requirements not only improve rates of vaccination among health care workers,<sup>3</sup> but also diminishes in-hospital morbidity from influenza and/or pneumonia.<sup>4</sup>

### **Order**

**We, as the Health Officers of Calaveras, Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties, under the general authority of California Health Officers to take measures as may be necessary to prevent and control the spread of disease (Health and Safety Code §120175) require that each and every licensed health care facility and ambulance agency in Calaveras, Tuolumne and Mariposa counties respectively implement a program requiring their health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask during every influenza season while working in patient care areas in that health care facility or during direct encounters with patients in the pre-hospital setting.**

### **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 March 31 of the following year. In any given year, if influenza surveillance data demonstrate an unusually early or extended season, and continued widespread influenza activity in the spring, we may initiate earlier or extend later the period during which the masking program shall apply for that year.

### **Definition of HCWs**

For the purposes of this order, “health care workers” or “HCWs” are persons, paid and unpaid, working in licensed health care settings who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas. Licensed health care settings are defined in California Health & Safety Code Sections 1200-1209 and 1250-1264.<sup>5</sup>

We appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of our community. For any additional questions, please call the following numbers for your specific county:

- Calaveras County: Calaveras County Health Department 209-754-6460
- Tuolumne County: Tuolumne County Health Department 209-533-7401
- Mariposa County: Mariposa County Health Department 209-966-3689

Sincerely,



Dean Kelaita MD  
Calaveras County Health Officer

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<sup>2</sup> Osterholm, M. et al, *Efficacy and effectiveness of influenza vaccines: a systematic review and meta-analysis* The Lancet, Vol 12 January 2012, pp. 36-43

<sup>3</sup> Stewart, A et al, *Influenza Vaccination of the Workforce: A Literature Review* U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Spring 2011

<sup>4</sup> Riphagen-Dalhuisen, J et al *Hospital-based cluster randomized controlled trial to assess effects of a multi-faceted programme on influenza vaccine coverage among hospital healthcare workers and nosocomial influenza in the Netherlands, 2009 to 2011* Eurosurveillance, June 2013

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.legendinfo.ca.gov/html/hsc\\_table\\_of\\_contents.html](http://www.legendinfo.ca.gov/html/hsc_table_of_contents.html)