



MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 15, 2022
TO: Hospitals, Ambulatory and Community Clinics, Skilled Nursing and Other Long-Term Care Facilities
FROM: Ori Tzvieli, M.D., Health Officer
SUBJECT: Influenza Vaccination of Health Care Workers for the 2022-23 Influenza Season

The upcoming influenza (“flu”) season may present additional challenges, with many experts concerned about a “double surge” of both flu and SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) viruses simultaneously. Therefore, as we approach this flu season, it continues to be important to vaccinate our health care workers against flu to:

- Reduce the risk of spread of influenza to patients and co-workers;
- Minimize staffing impacts due to ill workers staying home from work; and
- Reduce diagnostic confusion. As flu symptoms and COVID-19 symptoms are very similar, influenza vaccination will reduce the need for symptom-based COVID-19 testing and potential work exclusion of symptomatic staff.

In your role as a health care provider and mine as Health Officer, we share common goals: **reduce spread of serious diseases such as influenza and COVID-19, provide outstanding health care, and protect our health care workers (HCWs).** We can 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.

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. Furthermore, it is possible to become infected with flu and COVID-19 at the same time, which may increase the risk for severe illness.

For the purposes of this letter, HCWs are persons, paid and unpaid, working in health care settings who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas. The influenza season is defined as **November 1st** through **April 30th** of the following year. Typically, HCWs who decline flu vaccine will need to mask during flu season. However, HCWs are already required to mask under COVID-19 policies, regardless of vaccination status.



My strong recommendations regarding influenza vaccination this season:

- All employees should be offered influenza vaccine. Employer mandates requiring all HCWs to be vaccinated against influenza are strongly encouraged. True medical exemptions to the current influenza vaccine are rare. Exemptions should only be granted for those employees who are able to provide an accepted medical exemption document signed by an MD or DO physician.
- Providing on-worksite vaccination opportunities can be very effective in increasing employee vaccination rates and are strongly encouraged.
- Inform staff that getting a flu vaccine is an important part of "flattening the curve" and helping COVID response efforts: "Getting a flu vaccine helps keep flu illness out of our facility and maintains staffing levels, so we have more room, staff and equipment to treat COVID and/or non-COVID patients."

Key points of information about this year's influenza vaccine options:

- For the 2022-2023 flu season, the ACIP (Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices) now preferentially recommends high dose or adjuvanted influenza vaccine for those 65 years old and older. Please offer and encourage these vaccines to this population of employees, but if it is not available, per ACIP recommendations, any standard dose, age-appropriate influenza vaccine should be administered to avoid missed opportunities to vaccinate.
- The live, attenuated virus intranasal vaccine is approved as an option for use in healthy non- pregnant persons, 2 years through 49 years old.
- Seasonal influenza vaccine can be co-administered with other vaccines, including COVID vaccine and the bivalent COVID booster.

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of Contra Costa County, your staff, and the patients you serve. For any additional questions, please contact our Contra Costa Health, Public Health Division, Communicable Disease Programs at (925) 313-6740.

Cc: Board of Supervisors
Monica Nino

