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## Health Advisory

August 28, 2013

### Mandatory Influenza Vaccination or Masking of Health Care Workers During Every Influenza Season

#### Current Situation

As Health Officers for Alameda County and the City of Berkeley, **we are *updating* our joint Health Officer orders mandating that all licensed health care facilities in Alameda County and the City of Berkeley require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask during every influenza season (defined as November 1 to March 31 of the following year) while working in patient care areas. This order applies to all facilities regardless of documented HCW influenza vaccination rate. This updated order is effective August 28, 2013, and is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded or modified.**

#### Background Information

Influenza infection affects 5-15% of the US population every year, leading to an estimated 3.1 million days of hospitalization and 31.4 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. Mandatory vaccination or masking policies have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates to above 95%. After our first year of mandating these policies in Alameda County and Berkeley, overall HCW flu vaccination rates increased from 72% to 86% in acute care inpatient facilities.

**Please distribute to all providers in your practice**



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Our goals are to 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.

#### Order:

**We, as the Health Officers of Alameda County and the City of Berkeley, require that each and every licensed health care facility in Alameda County and the City of Berkeley 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.**

#### 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 late peak and continued widespread influenza activity in the spring, we may extend the period during which the masking program shall apply for that year.

#### Facilities Subject to the Order

This order applies to **all** licensed health care facilities in Alameda County and the City of Berkeley, including, but not limited to, hospitals, skilled nursing and long term care facilities, and dialysis centers. This order applies to all facilities regardless of documented HCW influenza vaccination rate.

#### 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.

We appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of our community. For any additional questions in Berkeley, please contact the Berkeley Public Health Division at 510-981-5300. For any additional questions elsewhere in Alameda County, please contact the Alameda County Public Health Department, Division of Communicable Disease Control and Prevention at 510-267-3230.

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