

October 13, 2021

TO: Licensed Acute Care Hospitals, Skilled Nursing Facilities, Long-Term Care Facilities, Intermediate Care Facilities, and Emergency Medical Provider Agencies

FROM: Anissa Davis, M.D., M.P.H., Health Officer, City of Long Beach

SUBJECT: Health Officer Order for Annual Influenza Immunization Programs for Healthcare Personnel (HCP) or Masking of Health Care Personnel during 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 City assist their healthcare personnel (HCP) to obtain influenza immunizations. Those HCP who decline immunization must wear a mask when they are in contact with patients during the annual influenza season. This Order has been in effect in Long Beach since October 2013. Last year, it was expanded to include EMS healthcare personnel and it will continue to remain in place for the 2021-2022 influenza season and future influenza seasons.

Influenza is a highly communicable disease, like COVID-19. 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. Given the continued presence and community transmission of COVID-19, there is an unknown risk of co-infection with SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 and the influenza virus, especially in high-risk individuals, which cannot be ignored. 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 the City of Long Beach, 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 all of Los Angeles County has risen from 58% to 79%, 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 City of Long Beach 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 it is 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: Upon request by the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services (LBDHHS), facilities and EMS provider agencies must report their HCP influenza immunization rates within the requested timeframe.

The Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services (Health Department) shares with the city'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.

Resources

Additional information regarding this Health Officer Order and the following documents can be found at the Long Beach Health Department's website at www.longbeach.gov/fluforproviders.

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

We appreciate your help and support protecting the residents of our community. If you have any questions, please visit www.longbeach.gov/fluforproviders or contact the Long Beach Health and Human Services Communicable Disease Control Program at 562.570.4302.

Attachments: Supporting Rationale for Requiring Influenza Vaccination or Masking for Healthcare Personnel

