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Oct. 15, 2025

To: Hospitals, Skilled Nursing Facilities, Long Term Care Facilities, and Community Clinics

In keeping with previous years, I am issuing a Health Officer order mandating that all hospitals, skilled nursing/other long-term care facilities, and community clinics in the County of Humboldt require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive annual seasonal influenza vaccination or, if they decline or are unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons, to wear a mask in patient care areas during the 2025-2026 respiratory virus season. For other clinical facilities providing direct patient care, we strongly recommend implementation of a similar policy.

As of October 2025, the COVID-19 virus is continuing to circulate year-round, and has not settled into a single seasonal peak. We are just coming off a late summer surge of COVID infections in Humboldt County, and many health care workers will have had COVID infections within the last 6 months, which makes it difficult to issue a broad requirement that applies to all health care workers, and any requirement would be logistically very difficult for health care systems to enforce. At the same time, our local health care systems continue to be strained due to staffing shortages and high numbers of patients; spread of influenza and/or COVID between staff and patients in health care settings this winter will further strain these systems. Protecting our health care staff and vulnerable patients presenting for care are critical priorities in our community. For these reasons, we are strongly recommending that individual health care systems implement a similar requirement for COVID-19 vaccines.

Based on statewide influenza epidemiology and wastewater monitoring, this year we are defining the respiratory virus season as spanning from Nov. 1st through April 30th (11/01/2025-04/30/2026).

As leaders in health care, I know we share common goals: to minimize the spread of communicable diseases, provide outstanding health care for our community, and keep our workers healthy. Influenza infection leads to millions of outpatient visits, hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, and hundreds of potentially preventable deaths every year. (1,2) Humboldt County continues to experience deaths from both COVID and influenza every year. Our health care system is facing large scale, systemic challenges. As we enter respiratory virus season, HCWs are at risk for influenza, COVID-19, and RSV and they can transmit these viral infections to their patients and co-workers. Patients in our health care facilities, especially young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and those with chronic health conditions, are at greater risk for hospitalization and death from influenza and COVID-19. All community members are at increased risk of additional health complications if we are unable to adequately staff our medical facilities due to high rates of illness among health care workers.



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Vaccination of health care workers against influenza and COVID-19 can reduce infection and absenteeism, decrease the severity of illness in individuals who do become infected, prevent patient morbidity and mortality, and results in financial savings to our communities and the health care system. Previous comprehensive mandatory vaccination programs that include masking for unvaccinated health care workers have been associated with health care worker vaccination rates above 95%. (4) State law provides that hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities, and certain other health care facilities must offer influenza vaccination annually to employees, and for those employees who decline such vaccination, maintain a record of the signed declination forms. California law requires most health insurance providers to cover authorized COVID-19 vaccines without cost-sharing. This order enhances both protection of patients and our health care system by requiring health care workers who are not vaccinated for influenza to wear a face mask in patient care areas during the respiratory virus season.

Definition of HCWs

For the purposes of this order, "health care workers" or "HCWs" are persons, paid and unpaid, full- time or part-time, employees or contractors, working in the licensed health care facility, who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas.

I appreciate your help and support in protecting our health care workers and community members. For any additional questions, please contact Humboldt County Public Health at 707-268-2182.

Dr. Candy Stockton, MD FASAM

Humboldt County Health Officer

cc: Infection Control Personnel, Medical Society, clinical facilities providing direct patient care.

