August 31, 2020

The designated influenza (flu) season for 2020-2021 is November 15, 2020 through March 31, 2021.

Influenza infection continues to account for thousands of deaths and many more hospitalizations and days of work lost each year in the US. Health care workers are both at risk for contracting influenza and for transmitting the virus to their vulnerable patients, and all adults and children of any age can contract severe illness related to this viral infection. This health order is issued for the purpose of minimizing influenza related illness, hospitalizations and deaths.

BACKGROUND

For the 2020-2021 flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends flu vaccination for everyone 6 months and older with any licensed, influenza vaccine that is appropriate for the recipient’s age and health status, including inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV), recombinant influenza vaccine (RIV), or live attenuated nasal spray influenza vaccine (LAIV4) with no preference expressed for any one vaccine over another.

There are many vaccine options to choose from, but the most important thing is for all people 6 months and older to get a flu vaccine this year. If you have questions about which vaccine is best for you, talk to your doctor or a health care professional.

Since 2010, the CDC estimates that influenza has resulted in between 9.2 million and 35.6 million illnesses (3-12% of population), between 140,000 and 710,000 hospitalizations, and between 12,000 and 56,000 deaths annually. Persons with chronic medical conditions, infants and children, seniors, and pregnant women are at greater risk for severe influenza-related illnesses and deaths. All Health Care Personnel (HCP) are at risk for both contracting influenza and transmitting the virus to their vulnerable patients. Patients in our healthcare facilities are especially vulnerable to influenza.

ORDER

Pursuant to my authority under §120175 of the California Health and Safety Code, I, as the Interim Health Officer of the County of Fresno, hereby order that licensed acute care hospitals, ambulatory and community clinics, emergency medical service agencies, long-term care and skilled nursing facilities, mental health and substance use care clinics, and private physician practices in Fresno County implement a program requiring its healthcare personnel to receive an annual influenza vaccination.

Health care personnel are required to wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season while working in patient care areas in that health care facility and until further masking guidance is received for COVID-19 response. Because universal masking is in place for COVID-19, I am requiring health care personnel to wear a purple badge/tag color to identify which staff have received their flu vaccine during the 2020-2021 influenza season.
All other county residents age 6 months and older are strongly recommended for flu vaccination, and their medical providers are encouraged to help them achieve this vital public health goal. Persons with clinical documented contraindications such as prior severe allergic reaction to influenza vaccine are exempt from this order; for all others, voluntary compliance is encouraged.

PERSONS COVERED

“Health care personnel” are all persons, including paid and unpaid employees, contractors, students, and volunteers, who work in areas where patient care is provided in a licensed or unlicensed facility subject to this Order, or who, otherwise, have direct contact with patients at such a facility.

Health care personnel includes, but is not limited to, physicians (e.g., in private practice or healthcare systems), nurses, nursing assistants, therapists, technicians, emergency medical service personnel, dental personnel, pharmacists, laboratory personnel, autopsy personnel, students and trainees, contractual staff not employed by the health-care facility, and persons (e.g., clerical, dietary, housekeeping, laundry, security, maintenance, administrative, billing, and volunteers) not directly involved in patient care, but potentially exposed to infectious agents that can be transmitted to and from health care workers and patients.

For the purposes of this Order, emergency medical service personnel include paramedics, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and advanced EMTs. Physicians who are licensed independent practitioners are also considered healthcare personnel, as well as employees of nursing homes and chronic care facilities, students in these professions, volunteers, and ancillary personnel who provide services within six feet of a patient.

DURATION OF ORDER

This order is ongoing indefinitely and applies to the each and future influenza season unless the order is rescinded. The influenza season is defined as November 15, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

The Fresno County Department of Public Health shares with all healthcare professionals, facilities, and agencies the expressed goal of assuring that our local population receives safe and effective care. We trust that all settings, subject to this Order, will comply fully with it and will notify their HCP of its provisions.

Rais Vohra, MD
Interim Health Officer
Fresno County
Department of Public Health

Resources: