MEMORANDUM

DATE: 2020-09-08

TO: Hospitals, Skilled Nursing, and other Long-Term Care Facilities in San Francisco

FROM: Tomás J. Aragón, MD, DrPH, Health Officer

SUBJECT: Health Officer Order: Mandatory Influenza Vaccination or Masking of Health Care Workers During Influenza Season

As in previous years, I am issuing a Health Officer order mandating that all hospitals, skilled nursing, and other long-term care facilities in the City and County of San Francisco require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask in patient care areas during the influenza season.

For other clinical facilities, we strongly recommend implementation of a similar policy.

Based on statewide influenza epidemiology and in accordance with the practice in many other California counties, this year we will again define the influenza season as spanning from November 1 through April 30 (11/1/2020-4/30/2021). Modifications may still be possible based on local epidemiology, but are unlikely to result in a shorter seasonal span.

This year, the emergence of COVID-19 as a global pandemic has caused and is continuing to cause short- and long-term health consequences, significant burdens on the health care system, and untold societal and social disruption as well as economic harm. San Francisco has experienced surges in infections and hospitalizations due to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and the threat of the virus is ongoing.

It is likely that SARS-CoV-2 infections and seasonal influenza infections will occur simultaneously during the 2020-21 influenza season. There is as yet no approved vaccine for prevention of COVID-19, but we do have an array of FDA-approved, safe and effective vaccines for the prevention of seasonal influenza.
Seasonal influenza vaccination is especially important this year in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prevention of influenza is critical to reducing anticipated surge demands for healthcare services, including hospitalizations and testing persons with symptoms of influenza-like illness.

HCWs are at risk for influenza illness and can transmit the virus to their patients and coworkers. Patients in our health care facilities, especially young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and those with chronic health conditions, are at greater risk for influenza-related hospitalizations and death. Moreover, HCW influenza-related illness can cause absenteeism, placing further strain on our limited healthcare resources, and is preventable by means of annual vaccination.

Healthy People 2020 objectives target a 90 percent seasonal influenza vaccination rate for all health care personnel. Comprehensive mandatory vaccination programs that include masking for unvaccinated health care workers have been associated with health care worker vaccination rates above 95%.

According to state law, the Aerosol Transmissible Diseases Standard of Cal/OSHA 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 that decline such vaccination, maintain a record of the signed declination form.

**Order**

I, as the Health Officer of the City and County of San Francisco, am requiring that each and every hospital, skilled nursing, and long-term care facility in San Francisco implement a program requiring its health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask for the duration of the influenza season while working in patient care areas.

**Duration of Order**

This order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded. The influenza season is hereby defined as November 1 through April 30. In any given year, if influenza surveillance data demonstrate unusually early and/or late peaks, I may shift or extend the period during which the masking program shall apply for that season.

**Facilities Subject to the Order**

This order applies to hospitals, skilled nursing, and other long-term care facilities. For other clinical facilities, we strongly recommend implementation of a similar policy.
**Definition of HCW**

For the purposes of this order, "health care workers" or "HCW" 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 the residents of the City and County of San Francisco. For any additional questions about this Order, please contact the SFDPH Communicable Disease Prevention Unit at (415) 554-2955.

Cc:  
Grant Colfax, MD  
Director of Health  
Julie Van Nostern  
Deputy City Attorney

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i See https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/immunization-and-infectious-diseases/objectives
