



James Mu, MD, Public Health Officer
2650 Breslauer Way
Redding, CA 96001-4246
Phone: (530) 225-5591
Fax: (530) 225-3743
Toll Free: (800) 971-1999
CA Relay Service: (800) 735-2922

TO: General Acute Care Hospital CEOs, Human Resource, Medical and Nursing Directors; Skilled Nursing Facility Administrative, Medical and Nursing Directors; Community Health Center Administrative, Medical, and Nursing Directors; Adult Day Health Center Administrative, Medical, and Nursing Directors; Dialysis Centers; Infection Control Practitioners; Health Facility Occupational Health Directors; Pre-Hospital Care Ambulance Provider Administrators; Communicable Disease Public Health Nurses; and Physicians, Physician Assistants, Nurse Practitioners and Medical Office Managers

RE: Rescinding Health Officer Order for Flu Vaccine or Mask for Healthcare Workers

Date: February 13, 2024

As Public Health Officer for Shasta County, I am rescinding the previous Health officer order mandating that all licensed health care facilities and ambulance services in Shasta County require their healthcare workers (HCW) to receive an annual influenza vaccination or wear a mask during the influenza season while working in patient care areas.

Rationale

Influenza Transmission and Vaccine Variability

The variability in flu vaccine efficacy from year to year raises questions about relying solely on vaccination. When vaccine efficacy averages around 43% for the past 20 years, as per CDC data, it is reasonable to explore other preventive measures. Moreover, there is no conclusive evidence that mandating healthcare worker vaccination significantly reduces nosocomial infections. [References: "[CDC Seasonal Flu Vaccine Effectiveness Studies | CDC](#)," "[The impact of healthcare worker influenza vaccination on nosocomial influenza in a tertiary hospital: an ecological study | BMC Health Services Research | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)," "[Influenza Vaccination of Healthcare Workers: Critical Analysis of the Evidence for Patient Benefit Underpinning Policies of Enforcement - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)"]

Other Influenza-like Respiratory Illnesses

Focusing solely on the flu vaccine does not address the transmission of other seasonal respiratory viruses. A broader approach, such as promoting respiratory hygiene, may offer better protection against various respiratory illnesses.

Autonomy and Effectiveness of Vaccination

It is essential to respect the autonomy of healthcare workers, particularly when real world data provides inconclusive scientific, medical, and logical justification considering the sub 50% efficacy rate of the flu

vaccine on the average. Mandates are not the most appropriate way to increase vaccination rates, especially when the vaccine's effectiveness is uncertain each year.

Privacy Concerns

Requiring unvaccinated workers to wear masks or display their vaccination status raises privacy concerns. Protecting individuals' privacy rights is essential in healthcare settings. Despite "Flu Vaccine or Mask" order, the early report of vaccine uptake rate is between 60 to 70% as of mid-November in both local hospitals.

To reduce influenza transmission in a healthcare setting, a comprehensive approach is recommended.

Vaccinations

- Encourage health care workers to get annual flu vaccines without coercions.

Respiratory Hygiene and Cough Etiquette

- Encourage everyone in healthcare settings, including patients, visitors, and healthcare personnel, to adhere to proper respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.

Management of Ill Healthcare Personnel

- Encourage sick healthcare personnel to stay home to prevent potential virus transmission to patients and colleagues.

Infection Control Precautions

- Strictly adhere to standard infection control precautions during patient-care activities, particularly those that generate aerosols.

Environmental Controls

- Implement environmental and engineering infection control measures to reduce the risk of transmission.

Minimizing Potential Exposures

- Screen and triage symptomatic patients, reduce elective visits during high influenza activity, and instruct patients with respiratory symptoms to inform healthcare personnel upon arrival.

Hand Hygiene

- Promote frequent and proper hand hygiene, as it is one of the most effective means of preventing influenza transmission.

Conclusion

My objective is to diminish the impact and spread of influenza and other respiratory viruses that are prevalent during the winter seasons. Depending solely on vaccines and masks, while having variable effectiveness, is not sufficient. A comprehensive approach is needed. Encouraging ill health care workers to stay home is a preferable approach to prevent the transmission of viruses to patients and fellow staff.

However, all facilities may implement their own respiratory transmission mitigation procedures. They may also implement policies to increase influenza vaccination rate if necessary.

For any additional questions, please contact me, Dr. Mu, Shasta County HHSA, at jmu@co.shasta.ca.us or 530-245-6870.

Sincerely,

James Mu, M.D.

Health Officer, Shasta County

Additional Resources:

[Physical interventions to interrupt or reduce the spread of respiratory viruses - Jefferson, T - 2023 | Cochrane Library](#)

[Influenza vaccination for healthcare workers who care for people aged 60 or older living in long-term care institutions - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

[Vaccines for preventing influenza in healthy adults - PAddMC \(nih.gov\)](#)