


## MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 1, 2025

TO: Hospitals, Ambulatory and Community Clinics, Skilled Nursing and other Long Term Care Facilities, other Licensed Health Care Facilities, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Provider Organizations.

FROM: Uldine Castel, MD  
Health Officer 

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

As Health Officer for Ventura County, I am now re-issuing a Health Officer order mandating that all licensed health care facilities and ambulances in Ventura County require their health care workers (HCWs) to receive an annual influenza vaccination or, if they decline, to wear a mask during the influenza season while working in patient care areas.

**Rationale**

In the United States, the standard influenza season typically begins the first week of September and ends the last week of May. Historically, the increased period of community transmission within Ventura County has been observed during a 4-to-6-week period between December and March. While a single peak of influenza activity was traditionally observed during this timeframe, since the 2017-2018 season, multiple waves of heightened activity had increasingly extended into the spring. As a result, based on influenza activity monitored over the past six years, the Health Officer order had been extended through April 30<sup>th</sup>. Understanding the duration and peak timeframe for increased transmissibility each season helps to inform recommendations regarding the optimal timing for vaccination. Considerations should be taken to adjust the timing of vaccination to allow sufficient time for the development of immunity prior to the peak of heightened activity each season, while accounting for the possibility of waning immunity.

The potential co-circulation of multiple respiratory pathogens and various influenza strains during the respiratory illness season remains a significant concern. Co-infection with multiple influenza viruses or other respiratory pathogens can increase the overall burden of illness throughout the community and elevate the risk for experiencing severe illness outcomes. This situation could potentially contribute to an increased demand for services and overburden the healthcare system. Increasing population-level immunity through vaccination remains our most effective strategy to prevent influenza infections, complications, and deaths, thereby preventing a strain on our healthcare system. Healthcare workers should be equipped to meet the evolving needs of our community during the respiratory illness season, while protecting themselves against influenza infection through timely vaccination.

During the 2024-2025 respiratory illness season, emergency department visits and hospitalizations related to influenza continued to exceed those associated with COVID-19 at the peak of the respiratory illness surge. Influenza vaccination rates slightly decreased throughout the community, with fewer than 30% of the population in Ventura County receiving a seasonal vaccine. Additionally, the 2024-2025 season marked an increase in severe outcomes and deaths associated with influenza which had not been noted since the severe 2017-2018 season. This rise in severity underscores the importance of seasonal influenza vaccination and the need to remain protected against a virus that can cause significant morbidity, particularly among susceptible individuals.

Influenza infection affects 5-15% of the US population every year. The CDC estimates that influenza has resulted in between 9.3 million and 41 million illnesses, between 120,000 and 710,000 hospitalizations, and between 6,300 and 52,000 deaths annually from 2010 to 2024. Preliminary data for the 2024-2025 season, estimates that between 47 million and 82 million illnesses, 610,000 to 1.3 million hospitalizations, and 27,000 to 130,000 deaths were observed. HCWs are both at risk for influenza and can transmit the virus to their vulnerable patients. Influenza vaccination of HCWs protects patients and reduces employee absenteeism during influenza season. State law requires that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer influenza vaccinations to employees (Cal. Health & Safety Code, §1288.7, subd. (a); 8 Cal. Code Regs., § 5199, subd. (c)(6)(D) and (h)(10)). If hospital employees decline vaccination, they are required to sign a declination statement in lieu of vaccination (Cal. Health & Safety Code, §1288.7, subd. (a); 8 Cal. Code Regs., § 5199, subd. (c)(6)(D) and (h)(10)). This order enhances patient protection by requiring unvaccinated HCWs to wear a face mask in patient care areas during the influenza season. Mandatory vaccination combined with masking policies for unvaccinated HCWs have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates.

In your role as a health care facility or EMS provider and mine as Health Officer, we share common desires: reduce the spread of serious diseases such as influenza, provide outstanding health care, and protect our HCWs. Our goal is to increase rates of influenza vaccination of HCWs, reduce employee absenteeism during influenza season, and reduce HCW-to-patient transmission of influenza. While compliance rates with the laws referenced above are high, actual HCW vaccination rates are not and may be below the level that will reduce the spread of infection in our health care facilities. Mandatory vaccination or masking policies have been shown to increase HCW vaccination rates to above 95%.

### **Order**

**I, as the Health Officer of Ventura County, am requiring that each and every licensed health care facility and EMS provider organization in Ventura County 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 in that health care facility or while caring for EMS patients.**

### **Authority for Order**

This order is issued pursuant to Section 120175 of the California Health and Safety Code, which authorizes local health officers to take measures as may be necessary to prevent the spread of communicable disease or occurrence of additional cases.

### **Duration of Order**

This order is ongoing and applies to each influenza season unless the order is rescinded. The influenza season is defined as **November 1 to March 31<sup>st</sup>** of the following year. In any given year, if influenza surveillance data demonstrate an unusually late peak and continued widespread influenza activity in the spring, I may extend the period during which the masking program shall apply for that year.

### **Facilities Subject to the Order**

This order applies to hospitals, ambulatory and community clinics, skilled nursing and other long term care facilities, jail medical facilities, dialysis centers, any other licensed health care facility and EMS provider organizations.

### **Definition of HCWs**

For the purposes of this order, "health care workers" or "HCWs" are persons, paid and unpaid, working in licensed health care settings who have direct patient contact or who work in patient care areas, including EMS prehospital care and interfacility transfers.

### **For more information please visit the CDC masking policies for healthcare workers:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/maskguidance.htm>

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of Ventura County. For any additional questions, please contact our Ventura County Public Health Division of Communicable Diseases at 805 981-5201 or e-mail to [PH-Admin@ventura.org](mailto:PH-Admin@ventura.org)