



# County of San Diego

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PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

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**TO:** Long-Term Care Facility Administrators

## **INFLUENZA ACTIVITY UPDATE AND OUTBREAK PREVENTION, CONTROL, AND REPORTING**

Dear Administrator:

We are providing this information to local long-term care facilities (LTCFs) to assist you in updating your plans to prevent and control influenza in our community. Influenza activity is increasing in San Diego County, as well as nationally. Several outbreaks have already occurred in local LTCFs. An influenza outbreak has the potential to affect a large number of residents in a healthcare facility and can result in hospitalizations or death for some patients. Timely prevention and control measures can help mitigate the impact of influenza on your facility.

**Health Officer Order for Influenza Vaccination Program.** Thank you for your efforts in previous seasons to vaccinate residents and staff. As the County of San Diego Public Health Officer, I re-issued a [countywide mandate](#) that healthcare facilities, including LTCFs, develop a program to require health care personnel to receive an annual influenza vaccination; or, if they decline, to wear a mask while in contact with patients or working in patient care areas during the annual influenza season, typically between November and March. We encourage your organization to implement a program that enforces the health order, especially as influenza activity increases in our region. Early season 2017-18 influenza vaccination coverage among healthcare providers (HCP) was [recently reported](#) at 67.6%, similar to early-season coverage during the 2016-17 season (68.5%). HCP and staff working in LTCFs had a lower rate (58.5%) compared to those working in a hospital setting (82.6%). Your support of required influenza vaccinations for your HCP, staff, and volunteers will increase the likelihood that your employees and patients are protected during the flu season.

**Preventing Influenza.** New residents who have not been vaccinated should receive flu vaccine upon admission. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has updated the composition of the 2017-18 flu vaccines to better match anticipated circulating viruses. Influenza vaccine is the best defense to protect individuals from illness. The vaccine is safe and effective, and can help prevent severe complications and hospitalization due to influenza.

**Recognizing Outbreaks.** The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has defined an influenza outbreak in LTCFs as at least one case of laboratory-confirmed influenza in the setting of a cluster of at least two cases of influenza-like illness (ILI) within a 72-hour period. ILI is defined as fever ( $\geq 100^{\circ}$  F/ $37.8^{\circ}$  C) plus cough and/or sore throat in the absence of a known cause other than influenza. Note that atypical signs and symptoms, including lack of fever, may manifest in certain populations including the elderly and/or medically fragile persons, as well as persons with neurological or neurocognitive conditions. Because it is very important to identify and respond to influenza outbreaks quickly, we recommend daily, active surveillance for respiratory illness among residents, staff, and visitors throughout the influenza season, with prompt influenza testing for any resident with ILI.

**Controlling Outbreaks.** If an influenza outbreak is identified, actions should be taken as soon as possible to limit spread of the illness among residents and staff. [Key control recommendations include:](#)

- Immediate influenza antiviral treatment for all residents with confirmed or suspected influenza;
- Prompt antiviral chemoprophylaxis for all non-ill residents regardless of influenza vaccination status;

- Standard and droplet precautions for all residents with confirmed or suspected influenza;
- Isolation of ill residents in their rooms (or cohort ill residents) as much as possible;
- Work exclusion of staff with ILI until at least 24 hours after they are no longer febrile; and
- Discontinuation (or limitation) of group activities, floating staff, visitation, new admissions, and facility transfers.

If you suspect an outbreak of influenza is occurring at your facility, immediately notify your medical director, director of nursing, the appropriate [California Licensing and Certification district office](#), the [County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency](#), staff, residents, and visitors.

**Reporting Outbreaks.** Please report all outbreaks of influenza to the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency by contacting the Epidemiology Program at 619-692-8499.

**Recommendations from CDC and CDPH.** Only injectable [influenza vaccines](#) (inactivated influenza vaccines and recombinant influenza vaccines) are recommended this season. The live, attenuated influenza vaccine, quadravalent (LAIV4) that is administered as an intranasal spray is **not** recommended for use in any setting this season.

#### Healthcare Personnel Vaccination

- Develop and distribute written information that describes the benefits of influenza vaccination and the possible side effects of the vaccine.
- Vaccinate new employees or request proof of vaccination prior to their start date.
- Obtain a signed "Consent to be Vaccinated" form. California law requires that acute care hospitals offer influenza vaccine to HCP at no charge and requires those who choose not to be vaccinated to sign a declination form.

#### Resident Vaccination

- Vaccinate current residents as early as possible.
- Vaccinate new admissions at any time between August and April, if not already vaccinated.
- Consider having residents or the resident's advocate (e.g., a family member, friend, or ombudsman) sign a "Consent to be Vaccinated" form.
- Assess immunization history and ensure that updated pneumococcal vaccination standing orders are in place for unimmunized residents 65 years of age and older.

Other helpful influenza resources include:

- [ACIP Recommendations on Prevention and Control of Influenza \(CDC\)](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Influenza Outbreak Management in Long-Term Care Facilities \(CDC\)\\*](#)
- [Toolkit for Long-Term Care Employers \(CDC\)](#)
- [Healthcare Associated Infections Program \(CDPH\)](#)
- [Influenza Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Facilities AFL17-02 \(CDPH\)\\*](#)
- [Recommendations for the Prevention and Control of Influenza in California Long-Term Care Facilities \(CDPH\)\\*](#)

\* These resources are dated for the 2016-17 influenza season, but are applicable to the current season.

Together, we can minimize the impact that influenza and other communicable diseases have on our most vulnerable populations. Again, thank you for all that you do to protect the health of your patients, their families, and your healthcare personnel.

Respectfully,



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