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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** September 30, 2024

**TO:** Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly in Contra Costa County

**FROM:** Ori Tzvieli, M.D. Health Officer

**SUBJECT:** Influenza Vaccination of Staff Members for the 2024-2025 Influenza Season

The upcoming influenza (“flu”) season may present additional challenges, with many experts concerned about a “double surge” of both flu and SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) viruses simultaneously. Therefore, as we approach this flu season, it continues to be important to vaccinate staff to:

- Reduce the risk of spread of influenza to patients and co-workers
- Minimize staffing impacts due to ill workers staying home from work

In your role as a residential care facility administrator and mine as Health Officer, we share common goals: reduce the spread of serious diseases such as influenza and COVID-19 and protect our staff and residents. By increasing staff influenza vaccination rates and reducing staff-to-resident transmission of influenza and vice versa, we can protect both residents and staff from influenza disease, hospitalization, and death.

For the purposes of this letter, a “staff member” is a person, unpaid or paid, who has direct contact with residents or who works in resident areas of a residential care facility for the elderly (also known as assisted living facilities, board and care homes, or retirement homes). The influenza season is defined as **November 1<sup>st</sup> through March 31<sup>st</sup>** of the following year.

Staff in residential care facilities are both at risk for influenza and can transmit the virus to residents and coworkers. Residents in these facilities are particularly vulnerable to influenza. Each year, 90% of influenza-related deaths and more than 60% of influenza-related hospitalizations occur in the elderly. Furthermore, it is possible to become infected with flu and COVID-19 at the same time, increasing the risk for severe illness.

As of September 26, 2024, the following Health Order has been **rescinded**: [2014 Mandatory Influenza Vaccination or Masking of Staff Members During Influenza Season.](#)

**My Strong Recommendations Regarding Influenza Vaccination This Season:**

- Although not mandated, it is also strongly recommended that employees receive the influenza vaccine and updated COVID-19 vaccine.
- Employer mandates requiring all staff to vaccinate against influenza are strongly encouraged. True medical exemptions to the current influenza vaccine are rare. Exemptions should only be granted to those employees who are able to provide an accepted medical exemption document signed by an MD or DO physician.
- Providing on-site vaccination opportunities can greatly increase employee vaccination rates and is strongly encouraged.

**Key Points Of Information About This Year's Influenza Vaccine Options:**

- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and ACIP (Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices) preferentially recommend a high-dose and adjuvanted influenza vaccine for those 65 years old and older (when available) over the standard vaccine. If those vaccines are not available, any standard, age-appropriate influenza vaccine is acceptable. The goal is to avoid missed opportunities to vaccinate.
  - The live virus nasal vaccine is approved as an option for use in healthy, non-pregnant persons, 2 years through 49 years old.
  - Seasonal influenza vaccine can be co-administered with other vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine.

**Tips To Increasing Acceptance Of The Flu Shot With Your Staff:**

- Keep it simple: "Flu vaccine helps reduce risk of hospitalization and death."
- Acknowledge that the flu vaccine is not always a perfect match to the circulating strains, but it is the best way to protect against flu infection and serious outcomes. Any flu vaccination is better than none.
- Inform staff that getting a flu vaccine remains an important tool for the prevention of potentially severe respiratory illness. It helps keep flu illness out of our facilities and maintains staffing levels, so we have more room, staff, and equipment to treat COVID and/or non-COVID patients."

I appreciate your help and support in protecting the residents of Contra Costa County, your staff, and the residents you serve. For any additional questions, please contact our Contra Costa Health, Public Health Division, Communicable Disease Programs at 925-313- 6740.