



**PUBLIC
HEALTH
SERVICES**

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COUNTY OF ORANGE HEALTH OFFICER'S ORDER

Annual Influenza Immunization Requirement for Health Care Workers During Respiratory Virus Season

Issue Date: September 28, 2026

Summary of the Order:

All health care workers who provide care in Orange County must receive an annual influenza vaccine for the current respiratory virus season.

Background:

Respiratory viruses circulate year-round in California and Orange County, but with more significant circulation of several viruses during late fall to early spring. These viruses pose significant risks to vulnerable individuals and can significantly impact local clinical ability to meet the medical needs of residents and visitors in health care settings. Additionally, vulnerable individuals commonly need medical care services during this period and require improved efforts to reduce exposure from health care workers involved in their care as well as the clinical settings they visit.

Influenza can be severe, leading to high rates of hospitalization and significant illness across the United States. In some years, the burden of disease is especially heavy, with notable increases in pediatric deaths and widespread community impact.¹ Multiple factors can contribute to heightened severity, including circulation of more virulent influenza strains, reduced community immunity, low vaccine coverage, and the simultaneous spread of other respiratory viruses.

Nationally, influenza can lead to substantial morbidity and mortality, with estimates ranging

¹ (Reinhart, Huang, Kniss, & Budd, 2025)

widely depending on the severity of a season - often reaching tens of thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations. During the 2025-2026 season, preliminary estimates indicate between 390,000-800,000 influenza hospitalizations and 24,000-81,000 influenza-related deaths.² Locally, influenza has periodically accounted for a significant share of hospitalizations and emergency department visits. Influenza has accounted for as high as 6.3% of all hospitalizations and 11.8% of all emergency room visits in particular seasons.

Yet, among health care workers across the United States, influenza vaccination coverage has been trending downward. Influenza coverage dropped from 80.6% in the 2021-2022 season to 76.3% in the 2024-2025 season.³ Decline in vaccine coverage coincided with surges in influenza-related illness, during which time emergency department visits for influenza surpassed those for both COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).⁴

Health care workers remain vulnerable - as they can be exposed to influenza both in the community and in clinical settings while caring for symptomatic and asymptomatic patients. During the initial 24 hours of an infection, a health care worker may be asymptomatic yet still shed the virus particle, increasing the risk of transmission to others. Influenza vaccination remains a critical preventive measure that has been shown to reduce risk of severe illness and absenteeism of health care workers during the influenza season.

The California Department of Public Health continues to support increased immunity through vaccination against influenza to reduce influenza severity. Furthermore, California law requires that general acute care hospitals and certain employers offer vaccination to employees (Cal. Health & Safety Code § 1288.7 subd. [a]; 8 Cal. Code Regs., § 5199, subd. [c][6][D] and [h][10]).⁵

This Order enhances patient protection by requiring health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccine for the current (each) influenza season. While this Order is focused on requiring an annual influenza vaccine to help protect both health care workers and the

² (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2025)

³ (Mehreen, et al., 2025)

⁴ (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2026)

⁵ (California Department of Public Health, 2025)



patients they serve, it also strongly recommends that all in the health care community adopt measures to enhance respiratory immunity and reduction of transmission by following vaccination guidance provided by the [California Department of Public Health](#) as well as improving [ventilation](#) in the clinical setting and following [mask use guidance](#) to reduce transmission during periods of high viral transmission in the community.

ORDER:

Pursuant to the Health Officer authority under California Health & Safety Code §120175, the County of Orange Health Officer hereby orders that all health care workers who provide care in Orange County must receive an annual influenza vaccine for the current respiratory virus season.

- 1. Purpose:** Influenza and other respiratory viruses continue to pose significant risks. High vaccination rates amongst health care workers reduce the risk of spreading influenza to patients, coworkers and the community they serve. This Order continues the annual requirement that all health care workers who provide care in Orange County receive an annual influenza vaccine authorized for use in the United States for the current Respiratory Virus Season.
- 2. Intent:** The primary intent of this Order is to lower the risk of influenza transmission to health care workers and patients by requiring health care workers in the inpatient, outpatient, and field settings to receive an annual influenza vaccine as a protective measure. The optimal period for health care workers to receive a vaccine is in October ahead of the Respiratory Virus Season, allowing at least 2 weeks to build up immunity from the vaccine.
- 3. Health Care Facilities Subject to this Order:** This Order applies to general hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, intermediate and long term care facilities, emergency medical services provider agencies, congregate living health facilities, chemical dependency recovery hospitals, acute psychiatric hospitals, dialysis centers, home health agencies, primary care clinics, ambulatory surgery centers, hospice facilities, chemical dependency recovery hospitals, ambulatory and community clinical settings, and any other licensed health care facility and emergency medical services provider organizations.



4. Health Care Workers Subject to this Order: This Order applies to the following health care workers:

- a. All paid and unpaid employees, contractors, contract workers, students, and volunteers, who have direct patient contact or who work in patient-care areas in health care facilities listed above and the prehospital care setting (e.g., any setting in which medical care is provided prior to the patient's arrival at a hospital). This includes, but is not limited to, physicians, nurses, aides, emergency medical personnel, ancillary health staff supporting medical and non-medical services for patient care and facility operations, including roles in laboratory, radiology, pharmacy, rehabilitation, and housekeeping. These positions range from specialized professionals like therapists and pharmacists to essential support staff such as cleaning crews, playing a vital role in the overall functioning and quality of health care delivery in hospital, long term care facilities, outpatient settings and field medical settings.
- b. Nothing in this Order shall be construed as an obligation, on the part of employers, public or private, to require employees obtain the annual influenza vaccine as a term or condition of employment.

5. Definitions. For the purposes of this Order, the Respiratory Virus Season—defined as November 1 through April 30 and inclusive of influenza season—is established as the period during which all health care workers who provide care in Orange County are required to receive an annual influenza vaccine authorized for use in the United States, unless a medical or religious exemption applies, acknowledging that viral activity may commence prior to or extend beyond these dates.

6. Influenza Vaccination Requirement: All health care workers who provide care in Orange County must receive an annual influenza vaccine authorized for use in the United States for the current Respiratory Virus Season prior to or during the current Respiratory Virus Season, unless an exemption, such as for medical or religious reasons, applies.

7. Masking and Return to Work Guidance for Health Care workers:

- a. Employers are required to follow [California Code of Regulations, Title 8, Section 5199. Aerosol Transmissible Diseases.](#)



- b. Health Care Facilities are advised to follow California Department of Public Health guidance posted at the [Respiratory Viruses Healthcare Professionals Hub](#) website for health care worker protective measures as well as return to work guidance.
- c. Outside of known aerosol transmissible diseases, during the Respiratory Virus Season, when there is evidence of high levels of respiratory viruses such as COVID-19, influenza, or respiratory syncytial virus in the community (trends indicating a rise in percent positivity, wastewater, emergency department visits, or hospitalizations), health care workers regardless of their vaccination status are strongly advised to wear masks in patient care areas as an added layer of protection. Facilities and health care workers caring for high-risk populations (immunocompromised individuals, or those at higher risk because of age or underlying conditions) can consider universal masking as an added layer of protection.
- d. During the Respiratory Virus Season, health care workers at highest risk of severe illness (extremes of age, underlying conditions, or have not received an influenza vaccine due to exemption) are strongly advised to wear a mask in patient care areas.

8. General Provisions

- a. This Order shall not supersede any conflicting or more restrictive orders issued by the State of California or federal government. If any portion of this document or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held to be invalid, the remainder of the document, including the application of such part or provision to other persons or circumstances, shall not be affected and shall continue in full force and effect. To this end, the provisions of this Order are severable.
- b. The Order contained in this document may be enforced by the Orange County Sheriff or Chiefs of Police pursuant to California Health and Safety Code § 101029, and California Government Code § 26602 and § 41601. A violation of a health order is subject to fine, imprisonment, or both (California Health and Safety Code § 120295).



- 9. Issue Date.** This Order issued September 28, 2026, remains in effect until it is revised, rescinded, superseded, or amended in writing by the County Health Officer.

IT IS SO ORDERED:

Date: September 28, 2026



Regina Chinsio-Kwong, DO
County Health Officer

References

1. Reinhart, K., Huang, S., Kniss, K., Reed, C., & Budd, A. (2025). Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths- United States, 2024-25 Influenza Season. *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 74(36), 565-569. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7436a2>
2. US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, November 21). *Preliminary Estimated Flu Disease Burden 2025-2026 Flu Season*. Retrieved from CDC Flu Burden: [Preliminary Estimated Flu Disease Burden 2025-2026 Flu Season | Flu Burden | CDC](#)
3. Mehreen, M., Garacci, Z., Razzaghi, H., de Perio, M., Laney, A., Kriss, J.L. & Black, C. (2026, April 2). *CDC FluVaxView- Influenza and COVID Vaccination Coverage Among Health Care Personnel- United States, 2024-25 Respiratory Virus Season*. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2026;75:164–171. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7512a2>
4. US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2026, July 28) CDC FluVaxView- Coverage by Season. Retrieved from CDC FluVaxView: <https://www.cdc.gov/fluview/covage-by-season/index.html>
5. California Department of Public Health . (2025, September). *Public Health for All*. Retrieved from California Department of Public Health: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Pages/public-health-for-all/publichealthforall.aspx>

