



**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** September 15, 2022  
**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 2022-23 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 residential care facility administrator and mine as Health Officer, we share common goals: **reduce spread of serious diseases such as influenza and COVID-19 and protect our staff and residents.** We can protect both residents and staff from influenza disease, hospitalization, and death by increasing rates of influenza vaccination of staff and reducing staff-to-resident transmission of influenza and vice versa.

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 1st** through **April 30th** of the following year. Typically, staff who decline the flu vaccine will need to mask during flu season. However, staff are already required to mask under COVID-19 policies, regardless of vaccination status.

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.

**My strong recommendations regarding influenza vaccination this season:**

- 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 for those employees who are able to provide an accepted medical exemption document signed by an MD or DO physician.
- Providing on-worksite vaccination opportunities can be very effective in increasing employee vaccination rates and are strongly encouraged.

**Key points of information about this year’s influenza vaccine options:**

- For the 2022-2023 flu season, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) ACIP (Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices) now recommends 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 COVID vaccine and the bivalent COVID booster.

**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 is an important part of "flattening the curve" and preventing facility disruptions: *"Getting a flu vaccine helps keep flu illness out of our facility and maintains staffing levels, so we have more staff to serve our residents."*

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.

Cc: Board of Supervisors  
Monica Nino

