



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Jeff Hamm *Health Agency Director*

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Flu FAQs for Healthcare Providers

December 7, 2017

When is the “flu season”?

Influenza activity begins to increase around October or November, peaks between December and February, and can last as late as May.

How long is someone contagious after getting the flu?

To be considered no longer contagious, a person must be:

- (1) 24 hours fever-free without using fever-reducing medication, AND
- (2) At least 7 days past the start date of their illness.

People often cough for a period of time after the flu because of damage and irritation to the respiratory system, but that does not necessarily mean that they are contagious. Some people, such as children, can shed virus longer than 7 days.

Does taking Tamiflu or other flu prophylaxis mean that a person is less contagious?

No. Influenza treatment, such as Tamiflu, can help reduce symptoms of the flu. It can also be used as chemoprophylaxis to help protect someone from getting influenza during an outbreak. It might reduce how contagious a person is, but the results are inconsistent. Therefore, it does not change our 24 hour / 7 day guidance as above.

What kinds of precautions are required for a patient with influenza?

Per the CDC, “droplet recommendations should be implemented for patients with suspected or confirmed influenza for 7 days after illness onset or until 24 hours after the resolution of fever and respiratory symptoms, whichever is longer, while a patient is in a healthcare facility.” Patients should be placed in a private room or area.

Can a patient with documented influenza be transferred from the hospital to a skilled nursing facility or long-term care facility?

Yes. The patient should be placed in a private room or area and droplet precautions should be followed until the contagious period has ended, as described above. Please note that Tamiflu administration does not change this recommendation.

If you get the flu shot, how well will it protect you from getting the flu?

Studies show that influenza “vaccine effectiveness” is around 50%. Vaccine effectiveness is vaccine protection measured in the real world in observational studies. (This is different from “vaccine efficacy” which measures vaccine protection in randomized controlled

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trials under optimal conditions.) If a patient has symptoms and tests positive for the flu, they are twice as likely to have **not** been vaccinated.

If you do get the flu, will your illness likely be less severe if you received your influenza vaccine?

Yes. If you are one of the unlucky people who get a flu vaccine but still manage to get the flu, you will most likely have a more mild illness. Studies have also shown decreased rate of flu-associated hospitalization if you get the vaccine. The flu vaccine still helps you even if you end up with the flu.

What is the best test for the flu?

There are rapid tests that can be done in the office, called rapid influenza diagnostic tests (RIDTs). They have low sensitivity, meaning a negative result does not necessarily mean that the person does not have the flu. A confirmatory test should be done. Our Public Health Laboratory tests for Influenza A and B Viral RNA by RT-PCR, which is considered the gold standard for testing. Send all specimen to our Public Health lab for testing!

I already had the flu. Should I get the flu shot?

Yes. The flu vaccine protects against 3 - 4 types of flu strain. So, if you think you had one, you are still susceptible to the other strains. Get your flu shot!

Do my employees have to wear a mask when they take care of patients if they didn't get their flu shot?

Yes. See the attached statement from our San Luis Obispo County Health Officer. Also, the CDC website has more details regarding management of influenza in healthcare settings: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/healthcaresettings.htm>

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County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department



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August 21, 2017

TO: San Luis Obispo County Pre-Hospital Emergency Medical Care Agencies

RE: Mandatory Influenza Vaccination of All Healthcare Workers in San Luis Obispo County

Influenza season will begin in the fall. Flu season is from October 2017 to April 2018. Last year, San Luis Obispo County experienced very high rates of illness and death from influenza, especially among our most vulnerable populations—infants and small children, the elderly, and the immunocompromised. But thousands of young, otherwise healthy people also die from the flu each year in the United States.

Vaccination of healthcare workers reduces infection and absenteeism among them, may prevent mortality due to reduced transmission to patients, and results in financial savings to sponsoring health institutions. The best way to prevent transmission of a disease like influenza to those persons we serve is to mandate vaccination of healthcare workers. There are two relevant laws in California which require healthcare facilities to make flu vaccine available to all employees (CA Health & Safety Code §1288.7 effective January 1, 2007; Aerosol Transmissible Diseases standard of Cal OSHA (Cal. Code Regulations § 5199), effective September 1, 2010.) Employees who refuse vaccination must sign a written declination.

In accordance with the intent of these laws, and consistent with the powers of authority of the County Health Officer, I am urging employers to require of all unvaccinated healthcare workers, that, in addition to signing an influenza vaccine declination statement, a mask be worn while on duty during influenza season. Influenza vaccine should be received by the healthcare worker by November 1, 2017; after that time, a healthcare worker should have either received the vaccine or signed a declination and be wearing a mask.

I am also recommending that healthcare administrators adopt an easy way to identify the healthcare workers who have received their influenza vaccine. One example of this type of concept is to place a sticker on the healthcare worker's badge following vaccination.

Thank you for your hard work in making San Luis Obispo County a healthy community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Penny Borenstein".

Penny Borenstein, MD, MPH
San Luis Obispo County Health Officer

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