



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY  
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
**PROVIDER HEALTH ADVISORY**

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## **Influenza and COVID-19: Fall/Winter 2024-25 Recommended Protections for SLO County Healthcare Workers**

Influenza season is rapidly approaching in San Luis Obispo County. While COVID-19 does not have a single season, this is also an important time of year to be mindful of its impact on our healthcare system capacity. As the recent late-summer surge highlighted, we as a healthcare and public health community are transitioning into an era of managing COVID-19 throughout the year in addition to managing influenza during the fall and winter. The purpose of this message is to provide updates and identify supports available during this transition.

### **Influenza and COVID-19 vaccines strongly recommended but not required by County Health Officer Order**

For the first time in 12 years, the SLO County Health Officer will not be issuing a health officer order to require vaccination or masking during the 2024-25 influenza season. Influenza and COVID-19 vaccination remain strongly encouraged but the responsibility for this protective measure is shifting from the County order to employers and workers.

This shift reflects the approach of a growing number of California counties and the progress we've seen in vaccination in our local healthcare community. When local healthcare leaders first requested this order more than a decade ago, the influenza vaccination rate for employees typically hovered just above 60%; today it is more than 95%, representing a new norm we have established as a community and which healthcare leaders believe can be upheld without an order. With regard to COVID-19, the shift also reflects the lack of seasonality and the decreased severity of disease as vaccination and treatment have become widely available and accepted. One year ago, data showed COVID-19 as the fourth-leading cause of death in the U.S.; recent [national data](#) shows it has dropped in one year to the tenth-leading cause.

However, strong expectations from employers will be essential to maintaining these high vaccination rates without an order. We therefore encourage employers, especially in acute care settings such as hospitals and long-term care facilities, to continue to require employees in patient care to get vaccinated. This not only helps protect patients but helps protect our healthcare workforce during times when capacity is most likely to be strained by worker illness and community need for care.

### **Vaccine recommendations for healthcare workers**

Healthcare workers are strongly encouraged to receive the updated 2024-25 influenza and COVID-19 vaccines by the beginning of the influenza season, defined as November 1 to April 30 of the following year. It takes about two weeks for vaccines to provide their full protection. Employers are

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expected to develop and maintain vaccine policies that support continued high rates of employee vaccination. Practical steps to support vaccination—such as providing vaccine on-site during work hours—can support employees in getting this important protection.

### **Vaccine recommendations for patients**

The updated 2024-25 influenza and COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for everyone ages six months and older. Healthcare providers play a critical role in helping inform and educate patients about influenza and COVID-19 vaccination, dispelling rumors, and providing information about vaccine safety and effectiveness. Your answers to questions matter and will help patients make an informed decision about getting their vaccines.

The Public Health team is available to come to your office to discuss influenza and COVID-19 vaccines with your staff and to answer their questions in a friendly and non-judgmental way. The Public Health team can also provide you with print materials, such as posters and handouts, and video material you can share in waiting rooms. Contact us if you would like our assistance.

### **Infection prevention reminders**

This is an important season to re-emphasize the importance of foundational infection prevention measures in addition to vaccination. Handwashing and good ventilation are especially key this time of year. Employers are asked to remind employees to stay home when sick (regardless of the cause of illness) and to mask diligently if they must provide patient care while experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness. As with vaccines, our Public Health team is available to provide information and printed materials focused on these measures; please contact us if you would like our assistance.

### **Treatment**

Treatment for influenza and now COVID-19 have become readily available and used more frequently, especially by higher risk persons. Healthcare workers are encouraged to stay informed of these treatment options—especially Paxlovid for COVID-19 and Tamiflu for influenza—and to provide them for patients when indicated.

We continue to hear from patients who struggle to cover the cost of Paxlovid when it is prescribed. As a reminder, the Pfizer patient assistance program can provide this treatment when needed via [www.paxlovid.com/paccess](http://www.paxlovid.com/paccess).

### **Local respiratory virus surveillance data**

The Public Health Department provides ongoing wastewater surveillance data for influenza, COVID-19, and RSV from five SLO County locations, along with data on test positivity and vaccinations. Find updated data at [www.slocounty.gov/virus-data](http://www.slocounty.gov/virus-data). For updates and information on COVID-19 in SLO County, visit [www.slocounty.gov/covid19](http://www.slocounty.gov/covid19) or call 805-781-5500 during business hours.