



Masking in Health Care Settings and Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly to Prevent COVID and Influenza

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is required to wear a mask and when?

The [California Department of Public Health currently requires masks](#) for all individuals while they are indoors at a healthcare setting, long term care setting, adult care facility, or senior care facility. This masking requirement does not change based on an individual's COVID vaccination status or the CDC COVID-19 Community Level and applies to staff, patients, visitors, and volunteers. Surgical masks or higher-level respirators (*e.g.* N95, KN95, KF94) with good fit are highly recommended.

What about the Contra Costa County Health Officer influenza vaccination and masking order?

The Health Officer influenza vaccination and masking order is ongoing and has not been rescinded. Everyone eligible for influenza vaccine is strongly encouraged to be vaccinated. As all staff working in a healthcare, long term care, adult care, or senior care facility settings are currently required to mask for COVID, any staff who decline seasonal influenza vaccination already comply with the Health Officer order for influenza vaccination or masking by wearing a mask while working in patient care areas.

However, should the CDPH remove the indoor masking requirement for COVID, these facilities would need to ensure that staff and volunteers who decline annual influenza wear a mask when working in patient care areas during the flu season (November 1 through March 31 of the following year).

The Contra Costa Health Officer influenza vaccination or masking order for licensed health care facilities and EMS was issued in 2012 and is available here in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

The Contra Costa Health Officer influenza vaccination or masking order for residential care facilities (RCFEs) for the elderly was issued in 2014 and is available here in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Why is the Contra Costa County Health Officer influenza vaccination and masking order needed?

Influenza vaccination protects health care workers (HCWs), patients, RCFE staff, and elderly residents. Influenza is a serious disease that can cause severe illness, hospitalization, and death in people of all ages. The most effective method of preventing influenza infection is through vaccination. HCWs are at increased risk of exposure to influenza from ill patients. Infected

HCWs and RCFE staff can transmit influenza to patients and coworkers before they are symptomatic. The licensed health care facility order has been effective since 2012 and is ongoing until rescinded. The residential care facility order has been effective since 2014 and is ongoing until rescinded.

Which licensed health care facilities need to comply with the Contra Costa County Health Officer influenza vaccination and masking order?

The Health Officer influenza vaccination and masking order applies to all health care facilities in Contra Costa County, licensed by the California Department of Public Health’s Licensing and Certification Division, including:

Acute psychiatric hospital	Intermediate care facility–developmentally disabled
Adult day health center	Intermediate care facility–developmentally disabled–habilitative
Alternative birthing center	Intermediate care facility–developmentally disabled–nursing
Chemical dependency recovery hospital	Pediatric day health respite care
Chronic dialysis clinic	Psychology clinic
Community clinic or free clinic	Referral agency
Congregate living health facility	Rehabilitation clinic
Correctional treatment center	Skilled nursing facility
District hospital with <100 beds	Special hospital
Emergency Medical Service Providers	Surgical clinic
General acute care hospital	
Home health agency	
Hospice	
Intermediate care facility	

There is also a separate Contra Costa County Health Officer influenza vaccination and masking order that applies to residential care facilities for the elderly (RCFEs), also known as assisted living facilities, board and care homes, senior living, or retirement homes. This order has been effective since 2014 and is ongoing until rescinded.

Who is considered a health care worker?

For the purposes of this Contra Costa Health Officer order for influenza, a health care worker is defined as a person, paid or unpaid, working in licensed care settings who has direct patient contact or who works in patient care areas. A person working for a licensed home health agency or hospice who works in patient homes would be considered a health care worker with direct patient contact.

For facilities needing more guidance or clarification, here is the CDC National Healthcare Safety Network’s (NHSN) definition of a health care worker: a person who works in the facility, whether paid or unpaid, who has the potential for exposure to infectious materials, including body substances, contaminated medical supplies and equipment, contaminated environmental surfaces, or contaminated air. Health care workers can include, but are not limited to, physicians, nurses, nursing assistants, therapists, technicians, emergency medical service

personnel, dental personnel, pharmacists, laboratory personnel, autopsy personnel, students and trainees, contractual staff not employed by the healthcare facility, **and** persons (e.g., clerical, dietary, housekeeping, maintenance, and volunteers) not directly involved in patient care but potentially exposed to infectious agents that can be transmitted **to and from** a health care worker. It includes students, trainees, and volunteers.

When is influenza season?

Influenza season is defined by the Health Officer order as the period of November 1 to March 31 of the following year. The Health Officer may extend the mandatory masking period for influenza if surveillance data demonstrate an unusually late peak and continued widespread influenza activity in the spring. HCWs should be offered influenza vaccine before influenza season as it can take up to two weeks to develop protection.

What kind of mask should be used? When should masks be changed, replaced, or discarded?

Please check with your facility about details of the implementation of this order including specifications of type of mask.

How is this order different from an influenza vaccination declination policy?

State law currently requires that certain health care facilities offer influenza vaccination to employees. Employees that decline vaccination are only required to sign a declination statement. While compliance with this policy is high, influenza vaccination rates are not. Mandatory influenza vaccination or masking policies have increased HCW vaccination rates to greater than 95%. Influenza vaccination helps keep HCWs and patients healthy.

Can HCWs or residential care facility for the elderly (RCFE) staff decline influenza vaccination based on a religious or medical exemption?

Health care workers or residential care facility for the elderly staff that decline influenza vaccine must wear a mask during influenza season while working in patient care areas or resident areas.

What about HCWs and RCFE staff who have egg allergy?

Allergy to eggs should be distinguished from allergy to influenza vaccine. Persons with a history of egg allergy who have experienced only hives after exposure to egg should receive influenza vaccine. Any licensed, recommended influenza vaccine that is otherwise appropriate for the recipient's age and health status can be used. Please refer to the August 26, 2022 issue of the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) for more information about influenza vaccine and egg allergy (www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/rr/rr7101a1.htm). If a HCW cannot receive influenza vaccine due to a medical condition, then they must wear a mask during influenza season while working in patient care areas.

Should a HCW or RCFE employee who is immunocompromised or has a chronic health condition (asthma, diabetes, etc.) receive influenza vaccine?

HCWs and RCFE staff in these groups can benefit from influenza vaccination as they are at greater risk of severe influenza illness and complications. Any injectable influenza vaccine may be used. The live, intranasal vaccine should not be used in the immunocompromised. Please

refer to the August 26, 2022 issue of the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) for more information about influenza vaccine and immunocompromised persons.

Should a HCW or RCFE employee who is pregnant receive influenza vaccine?

The influenza shot can and should be given to pregnant people during any trimester. Pregnant people and their newborn can benefit from influenza vaccination as both are at greater risk of severe influenza illness and complications. People who receive influenza vaccine during pregnancy can pass protection to their newborn. This is important because children under six months of age are too young to be vaccinated for influenza. By California law, pregnant people should receive preservative-free influenza vaccine available as prefilled syringes and single dose vials.

What kind of flu vaccine can HCWs and RCFE staff receive?

There are multiple flu vaccines available with varying age indications. An adjuvanted or high-dose influenza vaccine is preferred for persons 65 years of age and older but vaccination should not be delayed due to its unavailability. Instead, any influenza vaccine that is appropriate for the person's age and health conditions should be given. Nasal spray vaccine is licensed for use in healthy, non-pregnant persons 2 through 49 years of age. HCWs who care for severely immunosuppressed patients who require a protective environment (*e.g.* bone marrow transplant unit) should receive the shot instead of the nasal spray. The Vaccine Information Statement for the [flu shot](#) and [nasal spray vaccine](#) are available here:

www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/flu.html

www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/flulive.html

Which takes precedence, Contra Costa County's Health Officer influenza vaccination/masking order or state laws regarding influenza and HCWs?

This Health Officer order is in addition to any State laws regarding influenza and HCWs. California Health and Safety code §120175 authorizes Health Officers to control contagious, infectious, or communicable disease and may "take measures as may be necessary" to prevent and control the spread of disease within their jurisdiction. Facilities must comply with the Health Officer order as well as the applicable State laws regarding influenza vaccine and HCWs. For instance, as specified under State law, acute care hospitals in Contra Costa will still be required to report their HCW influenza vaccination rate to the California Department of Public Health, and they will also be required to implement this order.