

FAQS: INFLUENZA VACCINE DIRECTIVE

– **FLU VACCINE UPDATES:**

Flu shots are now required for all staff working in healthcare settings in Alameda County and Berkeley, as recently ordered in a joint mandate by public health officers for Alameda County.

This new mandate notes that with the flu season overlapping the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk is higher for health systems to be overwhelmed by patients with critical respiratory illness. Although there is no vaccine yet for COVID-19, the flu shot remains a safe and effective way to minimize the impacts of flu season and thousands of related doctor and hospital visits.

Under Alameda County's new order, **all workers in healthcare settings must receive a flu vaccine** to help protect themselves, teammates, patients and the wider community.

Within our organization, all employees who work in Alameda County and have direct patient contact, must receive a flu shot no later than December 3, 2020. The new mandate specifies that you may only decline a flu shot if you provide a signed certification from your primary care provider stating that you have a medical condition that makes it unsafe to receive the flu vaccine. Masking is not an acceptable alternative to receiving the flu shot.

If you haven't yet received your flu shot, and you work in an Epic Care location within Alameda County, you must receive a flu vaccine on or before December 3, 2020. Flu vaccines are available at your local pharmacy, your doctor's office, or Epic Care (while supplies last).

If you are unable to obtain a flu vaccine through Epic Care, and you instead receive it from a different pharmacy or doctor's office, the out of pocket cost of the vaccine will be reimbursed to you with a valid receipt for payment. Employees who receive their shots from external offices will also be paid for time spent scheduling and traveling to and from a clinic to obtain the flu shot.

Although no similar mandates have been issued for Contra Costa County, it is possible that the same requirements will be issued in the coming weeks for other Bay Area Counties. We will continue to communicate this information to you as it becomes available.

HERE ARE ANSWERS TO SOME COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS MANDATE:

- **ARE FLU VACCINES SAFE?**

Serious problems from a flu vaccine are very rare. The most common side effect that a person is likely to experience is soreness where the injection was given. This is generally mild and usually goes away after a day or two.

- **CAN FLU VACCINES CAUSE FLU?**

No, flu vaccines are made with either killed or weakened virus strains.

- **AT WHICH EPIC CARE OFFICE LOCATIONS ARE EMPLOYEES REQUIRED TO RECEIVE THE FLU VACCINE?**

- Berkeley
- Castro Valley
- Dublin
- Emeryville
- Hayward
- Oakland
- San Leandro



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– **WHAT HAPPENS IF AN EMPLOYEE DECLINES THE MANDATORY FLU VACCINE?**

If you work in Alameda County, you may only decline the flu vaccine if you have a medical condition that contraindicates receiving the flu vaccine. In order to decline the flu vaccination, you will be required to provide documentation from your primary care provider regarding your medical condition. On receipt of such documentation, Epic Care will endeavor to offer a reasonable accommodation such as a transfer to a location outside of Alameda County, modified duty, if available, or an unpaid leave of absence.

If you cannot or do not provide the required documentation from your doctor by December 3, 2020, you may be placed on an unpaid leave of absence until:

- You receive the flu vaccine or;
- You provide a doctor's note to HR, exempting you from the County's order.

If you fail to comply with the order within two weeks following the December 3, 2020 deadline, or by December 17, 2020, you may be involuntarily terminated for cause (violation of the County's mandate).

– **WHEN ARE ALL FLU SHOTS/DECLINATION LETTERS REQUIRED TO BE COMPLETED?**

All flu vaccines must be administered with proof of documentation, or a doctor's note that identifies a medical condition that contraindicates receiving the flu vaccine must be submitted no later than December 3, 2020.

– **WHAT HAPPENS IF AN EMPLOYEE RECEIVES A FLU SHOT ELSEWHERE?**

Employees who receive a flu shot outside of Epic Care will be required to provide proof of the vaccine no later than December 3, 2020 in order to be in compliance with the new mandate.

– **HOW LONG IS A FLU SHOT EFFECTIVE?**

Protection provided by the flu vaccine is thought to persist for at least 6 months, which is within the timeline of the official flu season.

– **WHEN DOES FLU SEASON BEGIN AND END THIS YEAR?**

Flu season begins November 1, 2020 and ends April 30, 2021.

– **WHAT IF AN EMPLOYEE RECEIVED THE FLU VACCINE LAST FLU SEASON?**

You will still need to receive a flu vaccine this season because it only persists effectively in your system for up to 6 months. Additionally, each year, the flu vaccine is changed to contain the most prevalent strain threatening the public that year. Therefore, the previous season's vaccine will not be effective or sufficient to satisfy the mandated requirement.

– **HOW LONG AFTER IT'S ADMINISTERED DOES THE FLU VACCINE TAKE EFFECT?**

The flu vaccine typically takes two (2) weeks / fourteen (14) days to become effective.

– **WHEN WILL THIS MANDATE BE ENFORCED?**

Epic Care will begin to enforce this mandate for workers in Alameda County as of November 19, 2020 with a deadline for completion set for December 3, 2020. Anyone at the applicable locations who fails to comply with the mandate by the deadline will not be permitted to report to work until vaccination documentation or a doctor's note exempting him/her from the requirement is submitted.

– **DOES A SIGNED DECLINATION FORM REPLACE A DOCTOR'S NOTE?**

No, declining the flu vaccine in writing will not satisfy the mandate requirements. Employees must provide proof of receiving the vaccine or a doctor's note that identifies a medical condition that contraindicates receiving the flu vaccine no later than December 3, 2020.

– **IF A STAFF MEMBER REFUSES TO GET A MANDATORY FLU VACCINE AND ARE ON UNPAID LEAVE, ARE THEY ELIGIBLE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT?**

Eligibility for unemployment is determined by the State of California Employment Development Department. Please contact Human Resources for additional information.

– **CAN AN EMPLOYEE WORK FROM HOME IF THEY REFUSE THE FLU VACCINE?**

If an employee is currently working remotely given the scope of his/her duties, he/she may continue to work remotely but will still need to receive the flu vaccine if his/her duties require physical attendance on site, specifically in patient care areas or where patients are present (e.g. lobby, infusion suites, imaging centers, etc.).

– **WHAT PENALTIES DO WE FACE IF EPIC CARE FAILS TO COMPLY WITH THE MANDATE?**

The order holds Epic Care responsible for obtaining the vaccination and medical exemption records from all of its staff. Violating this mandate is described as an imminent threat and menace to public health, constitute a public nuisance, and is therefore punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both. The order does not specify the amount of the fine should Epic Care or any employee be found to be out of compliance.

– **WHERE CAN A COPY OF THE MANDATE BE FOUND?**

<https://covid-19.acgov.org/covid19-assets/docs/shelter-in-place/joint-health-officer-order-mandating-flu-vaccination-2020.11.2%20FINAL.pdf>

Thank you for protecting yourself against the flu and setting a healthy example for your patients, co-workers and loved ones.



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