



Mandated Masking and Strong Recommendation for Up-To-Date Seasonal Influenza and COVID-19 Vaccinations for Personnel in Mendocino County Health Care Delivery Facilities

UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF CALIFORNIA HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE SECTIONS 120175, AND EFFECTIVE NOVEMBER 24, 2023, UNTIL RESCINDED, SUPERSEDED OR AMENDED IN WRITING BY THE HEALTH OFFICER, THE HEALTH OFFICER OF THE COUNTY OF MENDOCINO ORDERS:

1. **Summary:** This Order of the Health Officer requires Health Care Workers to wear Face Masks while in Patient Care Areas of Health Care Delivery Facilities during the annual respiratory virus season from November 24 2023, through April 30, 2024, (and October 1 through April 30 in subsequent years) until rescinded. This Order also requires Employers of Health Care Workers to develop and implement policies which strongly recommend up-to-date seasonal influenza and COVID-19 vaccination.
2. **History:** Since the 2017-2018 influenza season the Mendocino County Health Officer has required Health Care Workers to vaccinate or mask to protect themselves and patients in their care against influenza. During the years of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Emergency, local orders were superseded by State and Federal regulations. Since the pandemic has ended and the State and Federal mandates were withdrawn, there has been a variety of institutional responses to prepare for the expected increase in respiratory viruses, which has contributed to concern within the community and confusion by various facilities.
3. **Basis for this Order:** Historically, there are higher rates of infection by COVID-19, influenza, and other respiratory viruses in Mendocino County annually between late fall and spring. Seasonal increases in respiratory viruses pose a particular risk to people more likely to experience severe disease and death if infected, including infants, older adults, and people with impaired immunity. Within health care facilities, we find the highest concentration of people who are ill and vulnerable and who entrust their health to their Health Care Workers. Increased infection among Health Care Workers leads to increased absenteeism which may cause facilities to experience inadequate staffing (a severe burden in the 2022-23 season), thereby impacting the community. Additionally, up-to-date vaccinations is the most effective way to prevent severe influenza and COVID-19 infections from leading to hospitalization and death and to lower the risk of developing Long COVID. Epidemiology has taught us that well-fitted, high-quality masks are very effective for protecting patients from infection (for example, in surgery, or who are highly vulnerable) as the infections are prevented at the source, and for protecting the wearer (both patients and health care workers). For these reasons, the masking of certain personnel in these facilities is necessary to provide a layer of protection to patients during the influenza season when the risk of exposure is highest. In order to contain the spread of these respiratory viruses, prevent severe disease among our Health Care Workers and preserve our health care institutional resources, the following orders shall go into effect this year by November 24, 2023, (and in subsequent years by October 1), and end on the following April 30 until rescinded.

4. Influenza and COVID-19 Vaccinations for HCWs Strongly Recommended: Employers of Health Care Workers and operators of Health Care Delivery Facilities shall develop and implement policies which strongly recommend up-to-date seasonal influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations for all such employees. The Health Officer recommends such employers encourage vaccination through meetings, mailings, posters, and electronic media. Whenever feasible vaccinations should be made available to HCWs onsite or encouraged offsite by facilitating and permitting appropriate time off requests pursuant to employer policies.

5. Mandatory Requirement to Wear Face Masks in Patient Care Areas of Health Care Delivery Facilities: Health Care Workers are required to wear Face Masks while in patient care areas during the annual respiratory virus season from November 24, 2023, through April 30, 2024, and October 1 through April 30 in subsequent years until rescinded. This Order also requires the operators of Health Care Facilities make Face Masks available to all HCWs at each Health Care Facility and to develop and implement a plan to enforce the masking requirement. Face Masks should be well-fitting Medical/Surgical or N95/KN95. A scarf, ski mask, balaclava, bandana, turtleneck, collar, cloth mask, or any mask that has an unfiltered, one-way exhaust valve does not qualify as a Face Mask under this order.

6. Exceptions and Accommodations: The following personnel may be exempt from wearing masks:

- a. Persons with a diagnosed medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents the individual from wearing a face mask. This includes persons with a medical condition for whom wearing a mask could obstruct breathing or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a mask without assistance.
- b. Persons who are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- c. Persons for whom wearing a mask would create a risk to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

7. Definitions:


- a. Health Care Delivery Facility means a setting where patient care is provided indoors. Health Care Facilities include hospitals, clinics, surgery centers, infusion centers, dialysis centers, sites that provide inpatient or outpatient health care, skilled nursing facilities, portions of long-term care facilities where nursing care is provided, and other facilities where patient care is provided indoors.
- b. Patient Care Area means any area that patients regularly access in order to receive healthcare within a Health Care Delivery Facility. Patient Care Areas include lobbies, waiting rooms, examination rooms, patient wings, elevators, and hallways used by patients. Patient Care Areas do not include areas such as cafeterias, break rooms or gift shops that are not used for the provision of healthcare or access to areas where healthcare services are provided.
- c. Personnel Subject to the Order: This Order applies to Health Care Workers which means all paid and unpaid persons who work in indoor settings where (1) health care is provided to individuals, or where (2) persons in care have access for any purpose. This includes workers in health care or other health care settings as well as workers in other direct care settings who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients/clients/residents or influenza airborne aerosols. Workers include, but are not limited to, nurses, nursing assistants, physicians, technicians, therapists, phlebotomists, pharmacists, students and trainees, contractual staff not employed by the covered facility, and persons not directly involved in patient care, but who could be exposed to infectious agents that can be transmitted in the

covered setting (e.g., clerical, dietary, environmental services, laundry, security, engineering and facilities management, administrative, billing, cosmetology, personal training, and volunteer personnel). To the extent that remote workers, or those not working within these facilities, do not meet this definition, then they would not be covered by this order.

8. Copies; Contact Information. Copies of this Order shall promptly be (1) made available at the County Public Health, 1120 S. Dora Street, Ukiah, CA 95482; (2) posted on the Mendocino County Public Health website <https://www.mendocinocounty.org/departments/public-health> and (3) provided to any member of the public upon request. Questions or comments regarding this Order may be directed to Mendocino County Public Health Communicable Disease program at (707) 472-2713.

IT IS SO ORDERED:

Dated: October 26, 2023



Dr. Andrew Coren, County Health Officer