



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

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Influenza and COVID-19: Fall/Winter 2025-26 Recommended Protections for SLO County Healthcare Workers

Influenza season has arrived 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

Again this year, the SLO County Health Officer will not be issuing a health officer order to require vaccination or masking during the influenza season. Influenza and COVID-19 vaccination remain strongly encouraged but the responsibility for this protective measure has shifted 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.

Strong expectations from employers will be essential to maintaining 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 2025-26 influenza and COVID-19 vaccines by the beginning of the influenza season. The season is defined by national public health laboratories as October 1 to April 30 of the following year. It takes about two weeks for vaccines to provide their full protection. Employers are 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 2025-26 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 can provide you with print

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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 with a respiratory or gastrointestinal illness (regardless of the cause) 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 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.

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. For updates and information on COVID-19 in SLO County, visit www.slocounty.gov/covid19 or call 805-781-5500 during business hours.