



July 16, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Planning for Influenza Season During a COVID Pandemic

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of California's physicians and hospitals, we request the State of California take immediate steps to prepare for the imminent flu season as we continue to fight against COVID-19. Specifically, we urge to you create an advisory committee to support a public campaign to increase influenza vaccination rates for the 2020-2021 flu season.

Our organizations stand ready to support your efforts.

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe symptoms that are highly similar to COVID-19 symptoms. In an average year, influenza is responsible for more than 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths nationwide. Certain populations, such as older people, pregnant women, and young children, are at higher risk.

The best flu prevention is an annual vaccination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends a yearly flu vaccine for everyone six months of age and older.

Physicians and hospitals are concerned a winter season with two major contagious diseases, circulating at the same time, will challenge call center, clinic, emergency, and hospital capacity, resulting in preventable suffering and death.

Flu vaccination is known to reduce hospitalizations and deaths. Even with a national vaccination rate of only 49 percent in 2018-19, CDC estimates that 58,000 hospitalizations due to flu were averted and a recent study has also shown flu vaccines were responsible for a 36 percent¹ reduction in deaths.

Increasing flu vaccination is a critical component of California's COVID-19 response.

The Influenza season typically begins as early as October, with flu vaccination usually recommended to start in that month. California needs to begin planning now for a coordinated campaign to increase flu vaccination.

¹ Garg et al, [Open Forum Infect Dis](#). 2019 Oct; 6(Suppl 2): S26.

In addition to increasing general public awareness, we anticipate it will be necessary to identify and create alternative sites for vaccination, like drive-through clinics, to avoid queuing and other potential congregate settings. These alternative sites will be important to not only stopping the spread of influenza, but also continuing the effort to physically distance due to the ongoing presence of COVID-19.

Additionally, we ask that the state work closely with the appropriate federal authorities to ensure there are adequate flu vaccine doses for California.

Even with a robust vaccination campaign, improved COVID-19 testing will be crucial as the two viruses exhibit similar symptoms. Supply and distribution chains remain severely disrupted and additional testing capacity will be needed to address the demands of both influenza and COVID. Testing kits and reagents for rapid testing are vital in the triage of patients and determinations of their duration of isolation.

The availability of a diagnostic multiplex PCR assay for influenza and COVID-19 would be a welcome enhancement to our current tools. This would ensure appropriate triage of patients and isolation requirements could be expedited, particularly for emergency and inpatient venues.

California needs to ensure it receives an adequate allocation of analyzers, reagents, and test kits in time for flu season. We ask that you continue to work with rapid test manufacturers to increase the availability of testing kits and reagents for both COVID-19 and influenza.

Without a COVID-19 treatment or a vaccine, there are limited medical interventions. Using attainable mitigation strategies, like vaccinating against influenza, to keep Californians as healthy as possible, is a critical part of the public health response to avoid overburdening the health care system.

Sincerely,



Dustin Corcoran
Chief Executive Officer
California Medical Association



Carmela Coyle
President & Chief Executive Officer
California Hospital Association

cc: Mark Ghaly, M.D., Secretary of Health and Human Services Agency