

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

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Protecting Los Angeles County Residents from Seasonal Outbreaks of Influenza

Every winter, seasonal outbreaks of influenza virus infection cause significant illness and mortality, harming families and placing a large burden on healthcare providers within Los Angeles County. While influenza activity in Los Angeles County is currently low, one influenza-associated death in an LA County resident has already been reported for the 2019-20 influenza season. During the 2018-19 season, 125 influenza associated deaths were reported to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (Public Health).

Influenza is not just a “cold.” Symptoms of the flu generally come on suddenly and can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue. While most people will recover from the flu within a few weeks, flu can cause serious complications, even in otherwise healthy people. Even an uncomplicated influenza infection can cause severe illness and possibly death. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick.

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Influenza vaccination remains the best way to protect from influenza infection, complications, hospitalizations, and deaths. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyone 6 months of age and older be vaccinated against the flu every year.

Although influenza can cause severe illness or death in people of any age, older adults are at particularly high risk. As people age, their immune system becomes less effective at fighting off infections. High-risk health conditions such as chronic lung disease and chronic heart disease are also more common among older adults. During the 2018-19 influenza season, 62% (77) of the 125 influenza-associated deaths that were reported to Public Health occurred among those 65 years of age or older.

The CDC estimates that, in recent years, between 70 and 90 percent of influenza-associated deaths occurred in those 65 years of age or older. Even when older patients recover from influenza infection, they may suffer from declines in general health status that may be permanent. A CDC study from 2017 concluded that influenza vaccination reduces deaths, intensive care unit (ICU) admissions, ICU length of stay, and overall duration of hospitalization among those hospitalized with flu – and the greatest benefit was observed among people 65 years of age and older.

Influenza vaccinations among those 65 years of age or older remains below the CDC's Healthy People 2020 targets. According to CDC estimates from the 2018-19 season, vaccinations are lowest among traditionally underserved minority groups, such as Native American/Alaskan Native (58.1%), Black (61.4%), and (67.4%) older Hispanic Americans. Encouraging vaccination among people of all ages, and particularly older Angelenos, is an important strategy for decreasing the burden of influenza-associated

hospitalizations and deaths in LA County.

While increasing vaccination among older adults has the potential to significantly decrease influenza-associated hospitalizations and deaths in the County, increasing immunization rates among Los Angeles County employees can have a substantial impact on the number of influenza illnesses in LA County during the upcoming flu season. Working-aged adults typically have the lowest vaccine coverage, but vaccine effectiveness rates tend to be high in this age group. A study recently published in the medical journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* found that increasing vaccine coverage rates among working-aged adults would have the largest impact on overall influenza burden. Los Angeles County employs over 100,000 people and is the largest employer in Southern California. By increasing vaccination rates among LA County employees, overall vaccination rates among working-aged adults will be increased.

In short, targeting older adults and County employees for increased vaccine uptake will have an outsized impact on influenza burden countywide.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Health to:

1. Assess existing influenza outreach efforts to identify additional opportunities to reach seniors and others at risk for severe complications from this illness, and provide targeted, culturally and linguistically sensitive messaging and outreach to ensure key populations are reached, coordinating with the Department of Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Services to reach seniors through County programs and facilities; and
2. Work with the Director of Human Resources to develop messages to be sent to

all County employees to encourage and provide information on opportunities for influenza immunization to protect employee health and minimize absenteeism;
and

3. Report back within 90 days of the end of the 2019-2020 influenza season on lessons learned that can be applied to the 2020-21 influenza season to improve immunization rates in high-risk groups.

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