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September 19, 2023

All professionals in the EMS System for Metropolitan Oklahoma City and Tulsa

From: Jeffrey M. Goodloe, MD, NRP, FACEP, FAEMS
Chief Medical Officer, Medical Control Board

Re: Influenza 2023-2024

While your health, the health of your families, and the health of our patients is always in prevailing importance to me, the still continuing challenges, though better at the present than the past, of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic make this year's influenza season another potentially concerning one and influenza vaccinations are as important as ever. In service to those priorities, please read on.

While the influenza season in the US last year was fortunately low in severity, it was not by accident. It was the effect of continued measures we were taking against COVID in terms of masking and distancing when working with patients of high concern. Influenza in the Southern Hemisphere has again been milder than usual this year, and *perhaps* an indication that influenza *might* be tolerable here again, though some influenza experts are concerned that optimism could be misleading if it discouraged folks from thinking influenza vaccinations weren't really needed. This memo is purposefully held until mid-September this year to avoid "too early" influenza vaccinations, factoring the typical spike in influenza in Oklahoma being in the January-February weeks. There is such a thing as getting vaccinated ahead of ideal timing and then when you really want the protective effect most, it is unfortunately waning. Thus, not until the first half of October starts an ideal time window for vaccination against influenza.

This memo serves three purposes:

1. My reminder to you to take all the valuable information about personal protective equipment (PPE) that we have educated upon in our EMS system and to apply good infection control practices when caring for patients that have suspected influenza.
2. My request of you to get an influenza vaccination starting in early October and within the following 4-6 weeks. As I hope all of you genuinely believe, I will never ask of you what I am unwilling to do myself. I will be getting vaccinated against influenza in that same time period and have voluntarily received an annual influenza vaccination for the last 28 years. For several years now, Hillcrest Medical Center in Tulsa, like a growing number of medical facilities, requires its health care professionals to receive a seasonal influenza vaccination to continue working (unless medically contraindicated due to personal allergies, etc.). Remember that when you voluntarily receive vaccination, you protect you, you protect your families, you protect your colleagues, and you protect your patients and your communities.



While I have no plans to require you to be immunized against influenza to remain credentialed as an EMS professional in our EMS system, I do pass along my strong encouragement for influenza vaccination.

3. My authorization for Protocol 17J: Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Administration to become effective on October 1st for the 2023-24 flu season.

As alluded to earlier, this year we again fortunately have an additional topic to cover related to influenza vaccination: timing of these vaccinations in relation to COVID vaccination, specifically the newest COVID vaccinations that are suited to impart protection from severe COVID due to omicron variants of present concern, specifically EG.5, FL.1.5.1, and others in the XBB family subtypes. In short, it is perfectly safe to get an influenza vaccination regardless of timing of COVID vaccination. In fact, you can get both vaccinations simultaneously if you haven't had a COVID initial vaccination, booster vaccination, or bivalent booster vaccination.

No one will be surprised I still strongly encourage you to be vaccinated against COVID. And yes, I've now had a total of FIVE COVID vaccinations – the initial set of two Pfizer doses, a Pfizer booster, and Moderna booster, and most recently a Pfizer bivalent booster. It's fine to "mix and match" between Pfizer and Moderna branded mRNA vaccines. Some experts believe that mixing brands may even impart stronger immunity than sticking with the same brand for all COVID vaccinations. The worst reaction I've had to any of the booster vaccinations was a few hours of local arm ache and fatigue than faded within 12 hours.

Thank you as always for your efforts in service to others and for your ongoing dedication to excellence in the practice of EMS Medicine.