

# Flu Season: Frequently Asked Questions for Volunteers



## What is the Influenza Control Program?

Influenza – or the flu – can be a serious contagious disease, which is spread by droplet transmission through close contact with an infected person. Infected individuals are highly contagious and can transmit the virus for 24 hours before they show any symptoms.

Each year, there are approximately 3,500 deaths from influenza and its complications across Canada. Influenza causes by far the most deaths among vaccine-preventable diseases, outpacing all others combined. Hospitalized patients and seniors in residential care are more vulnerable to influenza than healthy adults. The vaccine is also less effective in the elderly and those with compromised immune systems, making it even more important that their caregivers are vaccinated.

Infected health care providers can pass the virus on to their patients before they even know they are sick. The most effective way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated and adopting preventative measures, such as proper hand hygiene and proper sneezing and coughing etiquette. Immunization helps physicians, health care providers and those who come into regular contact with patients reduce their risk of contracting influenza and spreading it to their patients.

To protect patients in our facilities, in 2012 British Columbia's health authorities adopted the Influenza Control Program Policy, requiring all employees, students, physicians, residents, contractors, vendors and **volunteers** to get immunized or to wear a mask during influenza season when in a patient care area. To further protect patients, the policy was expanded to include all visitors to our health care facilities.

## What is a patient care area?

A patient care area/location is defined as an area within a health care facility, including a contracted facility, hallways or lobbies, which is accessible to patients, residents or clients who are there to access care or services.

It includes any other location where care is provided, such as home and community care locations (including a client's home). It does not include locations such as administrative areas or private offices which are not generally accessed by patients, residents or clients.

## **What is the required vaccination period?**

The required vaccination period will be declared by the provincial health officer, usually at the beginning of December, and will typically last until the end of March. During this period, all volunteers must have received a flu vaccination or wear a mask.

## **When and where do I have to wear a mask?**

While the most effective way to prevent the transmission of influenza is to receive a flu shot (in combination with other preventative measures, such as proper hand hygiene), if you are not vaccinated you must wear a procedure mask whenever you are in a patient care area during the required vaccination period.

## **What type of mask should I wear?**

Procedure masks are recognized for use in this policy. These have been shown to be effective in preventing the transmission of influenza.

## **When do masks need to be changed?**

Simply change your mask when it gets overly moist – there is no set time designated when you need to change your mask.

It is important that you dispose of your used masks appropriately. Please dispose of masks in an available garbage can, and follow proper hand hygiene protocols before replacing with a new mask.

## **Where can I get my flu shot?**

There are many places that you can get immunized:

1. At one of the workplace health vaccination clinics;
2. At your own doctor's office;
3. At a local pharmacy;
4. At a public health clinic.

You can find a flu clinic by calling 8-1-1 or visiting the flu clinic locator at [www.islandfluclinics.ca](http://www.islandfluclinics.ca)

### **What if I am Over 65?**

If you are over 65, you are strongly recommended to get your flu shot – both to protect yourself and patients.

### **What if I am between 15 and 18 years old?**

You are required to be vaccinated or wear a mask under this policy. You can receive your vaccination from a workplace health clinic, pharmacist, physician, or public health office.

### **Can I consent to the vaccine if I am between 15 and 18 years old?**

Yes. Mature minors have the authority to give, refuse, or revoke consent for their own immunizations in British Columbia.

### **How do I report my flu shot?**

You report that you have gotten your flu shot to your volunteer manager or co-ordinator.

### **How much does it cost to get vaccinated?**

There is no charge for the flu shot if you identify yourself as a health care provider, regardless of where you receive the vaccine.

We know that you are committed to protecting your patients, and thank you for volunteering.