

frequently asked questions

Influenza Control Program Residential Care Facilities

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, across Canada there are between 2,000 and 8,000 deaths from influenza and its complications. 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 for frail seniors or other hospitalized patients, 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, when combined with other preventative measures, such as proper hand hygiene. 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, last year British Columbia's health authorities adopted a 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, this year all visitors to our health care facilities are included in that policy.

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, that is accessible to patients, residents or clients who are there to access care or services – including, for example, hallways or lobbies.

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.

I work in a counselling role with my clients. Am I covered by this policy?

Yes, you are covered by the policy and must get a vaccination or wear a mask during the required vaccination period. The policy applies whether you are providing services in an office, home or community environment.

I work in an administrative role and do not provide direct patient/client care. Am I covered by this policy?

Yes, you are covered by the policy anytime you are in a patient care area.

For example, if you work in an office environment where there are no patients or clients, you are not required to be vaccinated or wear a mask. However, if you work in an office environment where patients or clients might be present, you are required to be vaccinated or to wear a mask.

You are also required to vaccinate or mask anytime you leave your office and go into a patient care area such as a public hallway or washroom, or any other area where there are patients or clients present.

Am I covered by this policy if I am providing a non-health related service to a health authority, such as construction, courier services?

Yes, you are covered by the policy anytime you are in a patient care area.

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 contractors and health service providers, as well as visitors 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, 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:

- At your own doctor's office
- At a local pharmacy

You can find a flu clinic by calling 8-1-1 or visiting the flu clinic locator at www.health.gov.bc.ca/flu/

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.

How do I report my flu shot?

Report that you have received your flu shot to your manager or supervisor. You do not have to provide proof that you have been vaccinated.

We know that you are committed to protecting your patients, and thank you for your dedication to their safe care and well-being.