

Standard for Immunization of Health Care Workers

Section 8	Immunization of Specific Populations	Standard # 08.301
Created and approved by	Provincial Immunization Program Standards and Quality	
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Preamble

AHS Provincial Immunization Program Standards and Quality, Provincial Population and Public Health provides Public Health and other partners who administer provincially funded vaccines with ongoing and timely information relating to provincial immunization program standards and quality. These standards are based on currently available evidence-based information, Alberta Health (AH) policy, and provincial and national guidelines. Immunizers must be knowledgeable about the specific vaccines they administer.

Background

There are several specific groups of adults for whom certain vaccines are recommended because of the presence of risk factors for disease. This includes individuals in specific occupations that cause them to be at greater risk of exposure to certain infections or diseases. Health care workers (HCWs) are one such group.

All adults are eligible to receive immunization to protect them against tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, varicella, and annual influenza as part of the Alberta routine immunization program. In addition to routine vaccines, other vaccines may be recommended for HCW.

Contact with clients/patients or material from clients/patients with both diagnosed and undiagnosed infection, places HCWs at risk of exposure to vaccine preventable diseases. Maintenance of immunity through immunization is an important preventative and infection control strategy which safeguards HCWs and protects clients/patients.

For special circumstances, such as immunization needed for wound management/post exposure follow-up or during an outbreak, refer to standards specific to the situation for immunization recommendations.

There are certain vaccines that are recommended for adults based on their age or other individual risk factors such as medical conditions or lifestyle, but not because of occupational risk of exposure. These vaccines are NOT addressed in this Provincial Immunization Standard; if these individual risk factors are identified for an HCW, refer the HCW to Public Health or their primary health care provider for further assessment.

Provincial Population and Public Health will work with occupational health programs to provide consistent immunization recommendations for all HCWs. Provincial Population and Public Health or Zone Public Health is responsible for distributing, monitoring and promoting the use of vaccines supplied by AH for occupational health purposes. This includes information related to storage and handling of vaccines, eligibility criteria, guidelines for assessment of history of immunization and/or evidence of immunity of HCWs and the documentation of vaccines administered.

The best time for occupational health programs to review immunization status and provide recommended immunizations for HCWs is on commencement of employment.

Purpose

The purpose of this Standard is to provide principles and guidelines for the consistent assessment and immunization of HCWs.

Applicability

This standard applies to all HCW and is used to assess and make recommendations regarding immunizations for HCW in Alberta (for example, AHS Workplace Health and Safety, Covenant Health Occupational Health, Continuing Care Homes, Public Health).

The [Immunization Recommended for Health Care Workers Chart](#) outlines vaccines routinely recommended as related to occupational risk for HCWs.

The accountability for ensuring HCWs are fully immunized according to the [Immunization Recommended for Health Care Workers Chart](#) falls to the employer; however, health and safety in the workplace is a co-operative effort between the employer and the HCW.

The accountability for ensuring HCWs working in AHS facilities are fully immunized according to the [Immunization Recommended for Health Care Workers Chart](#) falls to AHS Workplace Health and Safety.

Competency

In November 2008 the Public Health Agency of Canada published the Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals with a goal of promoting safe and competent practices for immunization providers. The following competencies outlined in that document are applicable to this standard:

- Communication - Communicates effectively about immunization, as relevant to the practice setting(s).
- Populations Requiring Special Considerations - Recognizes and responds to the unique immunization needs of certain population groups.

Definitions

Health care worker (HCW) as defined by AH: Includes all hospital employees, other staff who work or study in hospitals (for example, students in health care disciplines, volunteers and contract workers) and other health care personnel (for example, those working in clinical laboratories, nursing homes, home care agencies and community settings), who are at risk of exposure to communicable diseases because of their contact with individuals or material from individuals with infections, both diagnosed and undiagnosed.

See specific information in the [Immunization Recommended for Health Care Workers Chart](#) and [Tuberculin Skin Test for Health Care Workers and Post-secondary Health Care Students](#) regarding the definition of HCW for Tuberculin Skin Testing.

Community setting: Includes locations where HCWs (including students in health care disciplines) may assess and provide care to clients/patients including, but not limited to, in client/patient homes, physician or public health clinics, continuing care homes, supportive living accommodations and/or schools.

Adequate Date: Written records containing a minimum of a year and month are considered adequate.

Inadequate immunization documentation: No written documentation of immunization, illegible documentation OR written immunization records that have less than a month and year as the date and/or incomplete vaccine information.

Refer to the [Standard for Individuals Presenting with Inadequate Immunization Documentation](#) for more detail on adequate date and inadequate immunization documentation.

General Statement:

HCWs are eligible for provincially funded vaccines based on guidelines and criteria established by AH. Eligibility for immunization is based on the HCWs related activities or potential work-related activities that put them at occupational risk of infection.

AH does not provide occupational health vaccines for federal employees as they fall under federal jurisdiction. For example, pre-exposure rabies vaccine is not provided by AH to Federal employees. This includes employees of Health Canada, Federal Corrections, Department of National Defense, RCMP, Canada Post, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and Parks Canada. Federal employees, who are residents of Alberta are eligible for provincially funded vaccines as per the routine adult immunization schedule.

Section 1: Responsibility of the Employer

It is the responsibility of the employer to:

- Assess the immunization status of each HCW at the commencement of employment.
- Obtain full immunization history and document the dates of the doses received for all routine immunizations and other vaccines.
- Offer immunization at the earliest opportunity to HCW with inadequate documentation or without evidence of adequate immunity (for example, hepatitis B and varicella vaccine).
- Maintain records of all immunizations and serologic tests.
- Institute an immunization recall system when necessary.

AH provides vaccines recommended for occupational health reasons at no charge. To ensure all HCWs are fully immunized, AH encourages employers to have an occupational health service that includes the provision of appropriate occupational vaccines on employment.

If an employer does not have an occupational health program, it is reasonable for an outside provider to charge fees **to the employer** for the provision of the services required to assess and immunize the HCW. This includes assessment of immunization history and status, referral for lab testing and review of lab results, administration of vaccines indicated and recommendation for follow-up serology. Fees cannot be charged for the cost of provincially funded vaccines. The [Communicable Diseases Regulation, Alberta Regulation 238/1985: Section 2.1\(4\)](#) legislates that the individual employee cannot be charged for the vaccine.

Section 2: Responsibility of the Employee

It is the responsibility of the HCW (employee) to:

- Initiate and follow through with the assessment of their immunization status with their occupational health program.
- Provide their employer with their full immunization history including documentation of the vaccine doses received and dates of administration.
- Follow through with recommended immunizations to ensure adequate protection against vaccine preventable diseases.
- Maintain their immunization record(s) as a part of their personal health care information.

HCWs are accountable to provide this documentation to employers and may need to refer to this information over the years, as part of their ongoing health status.

References

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