

Standard for Immunization of Post-Secondary Health Care Students and Students in Other High-Risk Occupational Programs

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| Section 8 | Immunization of Specific Populations | Standard # 08.302 | |
| 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. Post-secondary health care students are one such group. Students in other high-risk occupational programs such as animal health are also at risk.

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 routine immunization program in Alberta. Post-secondary educational programs should strongly encourage all their students to be immunized. In addition to routine vaccines, other vaccines may be recommended for post-secondary students in high-risk occupational programs (for example, health care, animal health, equine science, wildlife and animal research).

Contact with clients/patients or material from individuals with both diagnosed and undiagnosed infection places post-secondary health care students at risk of exposure to vaccine preventable diseases. Exposure to animals infected with rabies puts students in animal health related programs at risk of infection. Maintenance of immunity through immunization is an important preventative and infection control strategy which safeguards post-secondary students 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 a post-secondary student, refer the student to Public Health or their primary health care provider for further assessment.

Provincial immunization program standards for health care students are consistent with immunization standards for health care workers. Health care students seeking placements in AHS facilities require the same immunization/evidence of immunity that is required of health care workers in those facilities and may be refused placements if they are not compliant with these requirements.

Provincial Population and Public Health will work with post-secondary institutions to provide consistent immunization recommendations for all post-secondary students in high-risk occupational programs based on a risk assessment.

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 health care students and the documentation of vaccines administered.

The best time for post-secondary institutions to review immunization status and provide recommended immunizations for post-secondary students in high-risk occupational programs is on entrance/enrollment to the program.

Purpose

The purpose of this Standard is to provide principles and guidelines for the consistent assessment and immunization of post-secondary students in specific high-risk occupational programs including health care, animal health, equine science, wildlife and animal research.

Applicability

This standard applies to all post-secondary students in specific high-risk occupational programs including health care, animal health, equine science, wildlife and animal research. It is used for assessing and making immunization recommendations for post-secondary students who are residents of Alberta or students who will be attending post-secondary programs in Alberta.

[Immunization Recommended for Health Care Students and Students in Other High-Risk Occupation Programs](#) outlines vaccines routinely recommended as related to occupational risk for health care students and students in other high-risk occupational programs.

The accountability for ensuring occupational high-risk post-secondary students are fully immunized according to the [Immunization Recommended for Health Care Students and Students in Other High-Risk Occupation Programs](#) chart falls to the post-secondary institution; however, health and safety in the workplace is a co-operative effort between the student and the post-secondary institution.

The accountability for ensuring health care students placed in AHS facilities are fully immunized as outlined in the [Immunization Recommended for Health Care Students and Students in Other High-Risk Occupation Programs](#) falls to the post-secondary institution.

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 Students and Students in Other High-Risk Occupation Programs](#) 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 including, but not limited to, in clients/patient homes, physician or public health clinics, continuing care homes, supportive living accommodations and/or schools.

High-risk occupational programs: Include those programs with post-secondary students enrolled in health care as well as students in animal health (including research), equine science and wildlife programs who are at risk of exposure to communicable diseases because of their contact with people and/or animals or material from people and/or animals with infections both diagnosed and undiagnosed.

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:

Students accepted into specific post-secondary high-risk occupational programs including health care related, animal health, equine science, wildlife and animal research programs are eligible for provincially funded vaccines based on guidelines and criteria established by AH. Eligibility for immunization is based on the student's work-related activities or potential work-related activities that put them at occupational risk of infection.

Section 1: Responsibility of the Post-Secondary Institution

It is the responsibility of the post-secondary institution to:

- Assess the immunization status of each health care student and students in other high-risk occupational programs at the time of initial enrollment.
- 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 health care students and students in other high-risk occupational programs with inadequate documentation or without evidence of adequate immunity (for example, hepatitis B, varicella or rabies vaccines).
- 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 health care students and students in other high-risk occupational programs are fully immunized before leaving post-secondary programs, AH encourages post-secondary institutions to have a student health services program that includes the provision of appropriate occupational vaccines during the student's training and studies. When this is not possible, AHS will work with post-secondary programs to provide assessment and immunization in a variety of ways depending on the location and the resources available.

If a post-secondary institution does not have an occupational health or student health services program, it is reasonable for an outside provider to charge fees to the educational program/institution for the provision of the services required to assess and immunize the student. 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 student cannot be charged for the vaccine.

Section 2: Responsibility of Health Care Students and Students in Other High-Risk Programs

It is the responsibility of health care students and students in other high-risk occupational programs to:

- Initiate and follow through with the assessment of their immunization status with their occupational health or student health services program.
- Provide their post-secondary institution 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.

Health care students and students in other high-risk occupational programs are accountable to provide this documentation to their post-secondary institution and may need to refer to this information over the years, as part of their ongoing health status.

References

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