

Date: November 6, 2009
To: AHS Managers
From: Todd Gilchrist, Vice President, WHS&EW
Re: H1N1 Personal Protective Equipment

The United Nurses of Alberta (UNA) has communicated with their members on November 4, 2009, regarding nurses working in a high risk area and the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

This memorandum will provide an overview of Alberta Health Services' position on PPE and key messages that can be utilized by managers to address potential questions from employees.

Alberta Health Services' protocols for PPE in an H1N1 situation are compliant with Alberta legislation for PPE. However, in the face of conflicting science, AHS will not prohibit any employee from wearing a N95 respirator if the employee determines it is appropriate following a Point of Care Risk Assessment.

The following outlines Alberta Health Services' position on PPE during the H1N1 Pandemic.

- Alberta Health Services has implemented a comprehensive Point of Care Risk Assessment that evaluates the risk from a number of perspectives including whether the patient has influenza-like illness symptoms or conformed H1N1, the distance from the patient, the type of procedure being completed and whether or not the patient can or will exercise appropriate respiratory hygiene behaviours. Forceful cough and respiratory hygiene figure prominently into our daily operations as they are the most obvious signs for triggering the potential need for respiratory protective equipment. Respiratory protection is one control measure of many that can be employed in the protection of our employees. AHS protocols also consider gowns, eye protection, gloves, processes and procedures, work flow, hand washing, immunization and other factors.
- Our primary control in the protection of Healthcare Workers is immunization. We began our campaign on October 26th and to date have vaccinated 80,000 health care workers across the province, this includes AHS staff, physicians, contract providers, and other eligible health care workers. We have a goal of achieving 70% immunization rates among healthcare workers. The recent vaccine supply issues have slowed our progress but we are taking very aggressive measures to get healthcare workers immunized as soon as possible. Immunization for employees is not mandatory; however, we certainly encourage all employees to get immunized in accordance with the prioritized provision of staff vaccinations.
- All healthcare workers have had training on the Point of Care Risk Assessment and the appropriate control measures made available to them. Please refer employees to the Alberta Health Services Point of Care Risk Assessment Directive, H1N1 Training Program, Algorithm and H1N1 Transportation Directive that are located on our website at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/904.asp>.

It is important that our employees are aware of the measures that have been put in place for their protection and that Alberta Health Services continues to ensure the health and safety of all employees.

If you have any additional questions regarding this issue, please contact Todd Gilchrist, Vice President, Workplace Health, Safety and Employee Wellness todd.gilchrist@albertahealthservices.ca.