

## **Physicians and Vaccine Providers and the New Alberta Vaccine Cold Chain Policy (AVCC)**

### **1. Why did Alberta Health (the Ministry of Health) develop a vaccine cold chain policy?**

The Alberta Vaccine Cold Chain policy sets standards of practice to ensure that provincially funded vaccines are stored and handled appropriately by adhering to the national vaccine cold chain management policy and best practice guidelines. In addition, the new policy ensures provincially funded vaccines provided to Albertans are potent, minimizing the risk of compromising the safety and efficacy of these biological products and providing maximum protection to patients.

<http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/AIP-Vaccine-Cold-Chain-Policy-2017.pdf>

<http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/publications/healthy-living-vie-saine/vaccine-storage-entrepotage-vaccins/index-eng.php>

### **2. When does the new policy take effect?**

The policy requires full implementation by September 30, 2016. All providers of provincially funded vaccine must comply with the new policy. ALL vaccine providers could be liable to Alberta Health for replacement of provincially funded vaccine involved in a cold chain break leading to discarding of vaccine, dependent on the assessment of Alberta Health. Effective immediately, new community providers must demonstrate compliance with the new policy (including appropriate refrigerator) prior to receiving provincially funded vaccines.

### **3. Is the new policy applicable to physicians?**

Yes, this policy is applicable to ALL health professionals who administer provincially funded vaccines, e.g., AHS Public Health, community physicians, community pharmacists, and other immunization providers.

### **4. What is the “cold chain”? What is a cold chain break?**

The cold chain is the process of ensuring all vaccines are stored, handled, transported, and maintained at temperatures of +2°C to +8°C from the time of manufacture until vaccine administration to the patient. A cold chain break occurs when vaccine is exposed to light, or to temperatures outside of the recommended range. A cold chain break can reduce the effectiveness of the vaccine leading to lower than expected levels of immune stimulation.

### **5. Does the new policy only apply to influenza vaccine?**

No, it applies to any provincially funded vaccine including, but not limited to Td, pneumococcal polysaccharide and influenza vaccines. The guidelines and recommendations outlined in the new policy are applicable if your office also provides purchased vaccines for travel or other purposes.

### **6. What kind of fridge must I get if I want to continue administering provincially funded vaccines in my practice?**

- A dedicated fridge for vaccine storage is essential.
- Bar fridges are unacceptable as they are not manufactured to maintain a stable temperature, and may vary widely in temperature throughout the unit. Therefore, they cannot be used for storing vaccines.

- Domestic refrigerators are acceptable if the refrigerator and freezer compartments have separate external doors and have been assessed for consistent temperatures of  $+2^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+8^{\circ}\text{C}$ . For further information, follow up with your local Zone Contact or refer to the information in the link below:  
<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/hp/cdc/if-hp-cdc-smry-cc-mngmnt-rqrmnts.pdf>

- Purpose built or laboratory grade refrigerators are the recommended standard for storing vaccines to keep them within the required  $+2^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+8^{\circ}\text{C}$  range.

**7. My office is very small, and only has room for a bar sized fridge. Are there comparable sized acceptable fridges available? What is their cost?**

Yes, there are laboratory grade fridges of comparable size to bar fridges. There are various models available from different manufacturers. Contact the manufacturer in regards to the cost.

**8. Why must the temperature of our fridge be read and documented at minimum twice daily?**

Minimum/maximum temperature monitoring is a requirement regardless of the value of provincially funded vaccine stored in the unit or whether the refrigerator is monitored through an external alarm system, chart recorders and/or data loggers.. This is to ensure the temperature of the vaccine refrigerator is maintained at  $+2^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+8^{\circ}\text{C}$ , and you can respond as soon as possible if the temperature is outside of this range.

**9. What must I do to monitor temperatures?**

- A trained, designated staff member must be responsible for safe and effective vaccine storage and management, which includes checking and monitoring the vaccine refrigerator twice daily during working days and recording minimum, maximum and current temperatures to ensure cold chain is maintained between  $+2^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+8^{\circ}\text{C}$ .
- Document the temperature recordings twice daily using an appropriate AHS temperature log sheet.
- Report any cold chain excursions immediately by contacting your Zone Contact.

**10. What happens if I don't have the resources to purchase the required fridge or staff to monitor the temperature?**

You will not be eligible to receive vaccine from AHS. Your patients may receive influenza vaccine and other immunizations from public health offices and other community providers who are also required to adhere to this policy.

**11. Will there be any cold chain management education, training, or support for my practice?**

Yes, AHS has developed several resources including an e-Learning Vaccine Storage and Handling course to support community physicians and other vaccine providers. These resources can be found on the AHS Vaccine Storage and Handling web page at:

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page14001.aspx>

For further questions, please contact your Zone Contact.