October 2019

Why is it important for you to be immunized with influenza vaccine every year?
Influenza can lead to hospitalization and death in elderly people and those with chronic disease. Although they may be immunized, their immune response will not always protect them. Studies show that up to 25% of unimmunized health care workers are infected each year; 59% without knowing it. You might spread influenza, even if you have mild or no symptoms. The vaccine is estimated to provide about 60% protection; results vary by year depending on the relatedness of the circulating and vaccine strains. Even if you are not completely protected after immunization and become ill, the length and severity of illness, as well as the amount of virus you might spread, may be less. The vaccine has to be given every year because the strains change and protection is not long-lasting. If you have any questions about the vaccine, please call Health Link Alberta at 811.

If you do not get immunized and an outbreak occurs, what happens?
The Medical Officer of Health will normally recommend to your Manager that:

1. You are excluded from work at the outbreak site until the outbreak is over, which is 7 days after the last case. You are allowed to work at another site which does not have an influenza outbreak, but have to wait 3 days to make sure you have not been infected.

OR

2. You can continue working if you start taking an antiviral medication, oseltamivir, prior to your first shift and continue until the outbreak is declared over. Oseltamivir requires a prescription from a doctor, prescribing pharmacist, or nurse practitioner (https://abpharmacy.ca).

Alberta Health Services (AHS) and Covenant Health arrange prescriptions for their employees. Other employees may have to obtain their own, which may be difficult at the time of an outbreak. You may contact your prescriber before an outbreak happens to get an antiviral prescription, to be filled at the time of the outbreak. If a visit is required please bring this letter. Prescribers can find dosages at: www.ahs.ca/assets/info/hp/phys/cen/if-hp-phys-moh-cz-antiviral-dosing-recommendations.pdf.

Depending on employer/employee health insurance arrangements, employees may be required to pay for antivirals.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Medical Officers of Health,
Alberta Health Services, Central Zone