

April 1, 2015

Dear Colleague:

**Re: Availability of Splenectomy Kits in Acute Care Facilities**

In the past months there have been some significant changes to immunization recommendations for individuals with asplenia (functional or anatomical). Information regarding the changes and current recommendations is outlined below. As a result, generic splenectomy kits provided to acute care facilities are no longer recommended and have been removed from Edmonton zone hospital pharmacies. Effective immediately, **asplenic/hyposplenic individuals should be referred to their nearest Public Health Centre for provincially funded immunization** as follows:

- **Pre-splenectomy:** Ideally, individuals scheduled for a planned splenectomy should start the recommended vaccines at least 2 weeks prior to surgery.
- **Post-splenectomy:** When it is not possible to receive the recommended vaccines 2 weeks prior to the splenectomy (e.g., emergency splenectomy), the recommended vaccines should be started 2 weeks after the splenectomy.

A patient letter to facilitate the referral to Public Health is attached if you wish to use it.

For situations where immunizations are required in hospital, such as:

- an individual who is hospitalized for more than 2 weeks either pre- or post-splenectomy, OR
- the attending physician deems it necessary to immunize outside of the recommended 2 weeks pre- or post-splenectomy (e.g. patient is unlikely to follow up in the community)

**Please contact Communicable Disease Control, Edmonton Zone weekdays between 0830-1700h at 780-342-0227.**

**Rationale for Removing Splenectomy Kits from Hospitals**

- Most individuals undergoing splenectomy are hospitalized for less than 2 weeks after surgery. Therefore, for optimal immune response, should not be immunized before discharge.
- Multiple doses of meningococcal and pneumococcal vaccines are now recommended requiring more than one immunization appointment spaced several weeks apart.
- Unfortunately, complete immunization histories are not yet available on Netcare but are still held by Public Health. It is important to review the individual's existing immunization records because:
  - Many individuals may have already received doses of recommended vaccines.
  - Minimum intervals are required between doses of vaccine; therefore, previous doses must be taken into account when scheduling immunization.
  - In addition to vaccines recommended for asplenia, individuals should be assessed for eligibility for other routine provincially funded vaccines.
  - Immunization recommendations are continually being updated.

For more information about each of the provincially funded vaccines currently recommended for asplenic/hyposplenic, refer to the AHS Immunization Program Standards Manual at the following link:<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/10802.asp>.

Thank you for your continued support in emphasizing the importance of immunization for these at-risk individuals.

Sincerely,



Joanna Oda, MD, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health – Edmonton Zone

Enclosure: 1

**Letter to Patient for Public Health Immunization:**  
**Asplenic/ Hyposplenic**

Your physician has provided you with this letter because your spleen is not functioning well, or surgery to remove it is planned or has taken place. Without a healthy spleen, you are at increased risk for life threatening bacterial infections. The risk is lifelong, but highest in the first two years after removal of the spleen. In order to protect your health, you should ensure you have had all routine immunizations for your age as well as additional vaccines which are specifically recommended for people without a healthy spleen.

These immunizations are provided free of charge. They are best given at least two weeks before the spleen is removed. If this is not possible (such as after an emergency splenectomy), immunizations are recommended two weeks after removal of the spleen.

Please make an appointment at your local Public Health office and bring this letter with you. The public health nurse will need to know the date your spleen is being/was removed and which vaccines you have had in the past. **Please bring your immunization records with you** - especially if you have been immunized outside of Edmonton Zone Public Health. The public health nurse will let you know which vaccines are currently recommended, how many doses are required and how far apart they should be spaced. Most people will require more than one appointment. After the immunizations, you will be given an immunization record. Please keep this record and show it to your family physician or specialist.

To find out where your nearest Public Health Centre is located, call Health Link at one of the numbers listed below.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link Alberta at:

- (403) 943-5465 in Calgary
- (780) 408-5465 in Edmonton
- Toll-free 1-866-408-5465 elsewhere in Alberta

You can also go to [www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca](http://www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca) for general health information.