

September 24, 2020

Preparation for Influenza Outbreaks – Edmonton Zone

Dear Supportive Living (SL) Manager/Supervisor,

Alberta Health Services (AHS) Communicable Disease Control (CDC) nursing in Edmonton Zone kindly requests your assistance with the following:

- Letter distribution to all residents and/or their guardians advising of the need to obtain an antiviral prescription from their physician in advance of an outbreak for sites you are associated with;
- Work in collaboration with the owner/operator to ensure advance antiviral prescriptions are in place for all of the residents through their responsible physician and pharmacy;
- Compile a list / Influenza Outbreak Resident Tracking Tool of SL residents in preparation to influenza season; and
- Work in collaboration with AHS Workplace Health and Safety (AHS WHS) to ensure that they have an up to date AHS staff immunization list, and advise the owner/operator at sites you are associated with to maintain an immunization list for all other staff working at their site.

Annual influenza immunization for all residents and staff is recommended each fall to prevent influenza outbreaks and to help minimize outbreak severity. Outbreaks occur due to a number of factors, particularly low influenza immunization rates in residents and staff. While influenza immunization may not prevent influenza infection in the elderly population, it does help in preventing hospitalizations and deaths. When an influenza outbreak occurs, antiviral prophylaxis is one of the control measures put in place to help prevent further transmission.

IN THE EVENT OF AN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK

Site Residents

- The Medical Officer of Health (MOH) recommends that all residents take antiviral prophylaxis medication, usually oseltamivir, for the duration of the influenza outbreak to prevent further cases.
- Residents' prescriptions received by community pharmacists in advance of outbreaks will be dispensed at no charge once a confirmed influenza outbreak has been declared.
- Community pharmacists will deliver the medication to your site.
- CDC nursing will advise the outbreak site designate(s) to use the resident list / Influenza Outbreak Resident Tracking Tool to determine which residents are not receiving antiviral prophylaxis and whether this is due to resident's refusal or resident/physician oversight. If it is the latter, work in collaboration with the owner/operator at the site to determine who will need to contact a physician in order to get a prescription as soon as possible.

Staff (AHS and site staff)

- **Staff who are not immunized and are not taking the recommended antiviral prophylaxis should be excluded from working as outlined in the AHS Guidelines for Outbreak Prevention, Control and Management.**
- Health Care Workers (HCWs) who have been **immunized less than 14 days** prior to the outbreak may continue to work if they begin and continue antiviral prophylaxis until 14 days post-immunization, or for the duration of the outbreak (whichever is shorter).
- HCWs who are **not immunized** at the time of the outbreak should receive influenza immunization as soon as possible. They can continue to work if they begin and continue antiviral prophylaxis until 14 days post-immunization, or for the duration of the outbreak (whichever is shorter)
- HCWs who are **unable or unwilling to receive influenza vaccine** can continue to work if they take antiviral prophylaxis for the duration of the outbreak.
- In order to minimize interruption in employment and to facilitate prompt implementation of antiviral prophylaxis, it is recommended that staff immunization status information is tracked throughout the influenza season [September 1 to April 30], thus allowing quick identification of which staff will need to obtain a prescription for prophylaxis.

Antiviral Prophylaxis for staff

- The **Alberta Influenza Antiviral Drug Policy as Applied to Vulnerable Populations Living in Congregate Living Settings** policy defines who is eligible for provincially funded antiviral medication during influenza outbreaks. **HCWs in congregate living settings are not eligible for publicly funded antivirals under this policy.** Site operators must have a process in place in regards to coverage of cost of antiviral prophylaxis.
- Once an influenza outbreak has been declared, the MOH will recommend antiviral prophylaxis. The MOH will generally declare an influenza outbreak over seven (7) days after the onset of symptoms of the last case. Antiviral prophylaxis will be discontinued when the outbreak is over.
- Covenant Health OHS and Alberta Health Services WHS have a process in place for staff requiring antiviral prophylaxis. Covenant and AHS staff will be advised to contact their respective OHS/WHS at the time of an influenza outbreak for assessment and advice.

REQUESTED ASSISTANCE

- Distribution of letter addressed to residents**
Work in collaboration with the owner/operator at all of the sites you are associated with to distribute the letter **labeled #1** to all residents or their guardians. In addition, this letter should also be distributed to any new residents admitted to the site during the influenza season [September 1 to April 30].

- Arranging advance prescriptions for residents through their physicians**
Work in collaboration with the owner/operator to ensure advance antiviral prescriptions are in place for all of the residents through their responsible physician and pharmacy.
 - **For residents on an SL caseload (as per SL direction for the 2020-2021 season):** the owner/operator will assist with arranging advance antiviral prescriptions for residents on an SL caseload by working with the resident's physician and pharmacy.
CDC nursing will be distributing a letter to all family physicians in the Edmonton Zone detailing this process. If the site physician requires more information please contact CDC nursing for a link to the physician package on the AHS website. If a site physician is not available, please arrange for all residents to receive a copy the resident letter **labeled #1** so that residents can obtain a prescription through their offsite physician.

- Compile a list / Influenza Outbreak Tracking Tool of SL residents in preparation to influenza season**
We are including a tracking tool **labeled #2** as a **sample** in order to maintain an up-to-date list of residents and other important information during the influenza season [September 1 to April 30]. **If another tracking tool has already been developed for use, it can be used instead.** This list / Influenza Outbreak Tracking Tool is to be used in the event of an outbreak for implementing antiviral prophylaxis. The **sample** tracking tool (if used) is modifiable and to be used as you see fit. We suggest that it be completed in advance of an outbreak.
Please note the following:
 - Information about whether or not residents have received antiviral prophylaxis and influenza immunization must be reported to CDC nursing at the time of an influenza outbreak.
 - When an influenza outbreak occurs, residents who did not obtain an advance prescription for antiviral prophylaxis will need to see a prescriber to get a prescription as soon as possible. CDC nursing will provide a letter which can be distributed to residents or faxed directly to their physician.

- Distribution of letters addressed to owner/operators and staff (AHS and site staff)**
Please provide the letters **labeled #3 and #4** to the owner/operator at all of the sites you are associated with. The staff letter (**labeled #3**) should be provided to new staff hired during the influenza season [September 1 to April 30].

For more detailed information about influenza outbreak management, please refer to the AHS document "Guidelines for Outbreak Prevention, Control and Management in Supportive Living and Home Living Sites". This manual and additional outbreak resources can be found on the Edmonton Zone CDC Outbreak Toolkit at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/medstaff/Page13790.aspx>.

If you have further questions, please contact Communicable Disease Control, Edmonton Zone, at 1-844-343-0971.

Thank you for your continued assistance and co-operation.

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