



Standard for Immunization of Health Care Workers

Section 8:	Immunization of Special Populations	Standard #: 08.301
Created by:	Province-wide Immunization Program Standards and Quality	
Approved by:	Dr. Gerry Predy, Senior Medical Officer of Health, Alberta Health Services	
Approval Date:	March 1, 2013	Revised: August 3, 2022

Preamble

AHS Province-wide Immunization Program Standards and Quality, Population and Public Health Division provides Public Health and other partners who administer provincially funded vaccines with ongoing and timely information relating to province-wide immunization program standards and quality. These standards are based on currently available evidence based information, Alberta Health (AH) policy, and provincial and national guidelines. Immunizers must be knowledgeable about the specific vaccines they administer.

Background

There are several specific groups of adults for whom certain vaccines are recommended because of the presence of risk factors for disease. This includes individuals in specific occupations that cause them to be at greater risk of exposure to certain infections or diseases. Health care workers (HCWs) are one such group.

All adults are eligible to receive immunization to protect them against tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, varicella and annual influenza as part of the routine immunization program in Alberta. In addition to routine vaccines, other vaccines are recommended for Health Care Workers.

For special circumstances such as immunization needed for wound management/post exposure follow-up, during an outbreak, or for those individuals who have unique needs based on personal risk factors, (e.g. medical condition, lifestyle, pregnancy) standards specific to the situation should be referred to for recommendations regarding immunization.

Contact with clients/patients or material from clients/patients with both diagnosed and non-diagnosed infection places HCWs at risk of exposure to vaccine preventable diseases. Maintenance of immunity through immunization is therefore an important preventative and infection control strategy which safeguards HCWs and protects clients/patients.

There are certain vaccines that are recommended for adults based on their age or other individual risk factors (e.g., medical conditions or life style) but not because of occupational risk of exposure. These vaccines are NOT addressed in this Provincial Immunization Standard; the expectation would be that if these individual risk factors were identified in a HCW, the HCW would be referred to Public Health or their physician for further assessment.

AHS Population and Public Health will work with occupational health programs to provide consistent immunization recommendations for all HCWs. AHS Population and Public Health or Zone Public Health is responsible for distributing, monitoring and promoting the use of vaccines supplied by AH for occupational health purposes. This includes information related to storage and handling of vaccines, eligibility criteria, guidelines for assessment of history of immunization and/or evidence of immunity of HCWs and the documentation of vaccines administered.

The accountability for ensuring HCWs are fully immunized according to the ***Immunization Recommended of Health Care Workers Chart*** falls to the employer, however, health and safety in the workplace is a co-operative effort between the employer and the HCW.

The best time for occupational health programs to review immunization status and provide recommended immunizations for HCWs is on commencement of employment.

Purpose

The purpose of this Standard is to provide principles and guidelines for the consistent assessment and immunization of HCWs.

Applicability

This standard applies to routine immunizations recommended for all HCW in Alberta and will be used for assessing and making recommendations regarding routine immunizations for HCWs in Alberta (e.g. AHS Workplace Health and Safety, Covenant Health Occupational Health, Long Term Care, Public Health). The accountability for ensuring HCWs placed in AHS facilities are fully immunized according to the ***Immunization Recommended of Health Care Workers Chart*** falls to AHS Workplace Health and Safety.

Competency

In November 2008 the Public Health Agency of Canada published the Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals with a goal of promoting safe and competent practices for immunization providers. The following competencies outlined in that document are applicable to this standard:

- Communication - Communicates effectively about immunization, as relevant to the practice setting(s).
- Populations Requiring Special Considerations - Recognizes and responds to the unique immunization needs of certain population groups.

Definitions

Health care worker (HCW) as defined by Alberta Health (AH): Includes all hospital employees, other staff who work or study in hospitals (e.g., students in health care disciplines, volunteers and contract workers) and other health care personnel (e.g., those working in clinical laboratories, nursing homes, home care agencies and community settings), who are at risk of exposure to communicable diseases because of their contact with individuals or material from individuals with infections both diagnosed and undiagnosed. See specific information in ***Immunization Recommended for Health Care Workers*** and the ***Tuberculin Skin Test for Health Care Workers and Post-Secondary Students in Health Care Programs*** regarding definition of HCW for Tuberculosis Skin Testing.

Community setting: Includes locations where health care workers (including students in health care disciplines) may assess and provide care to clients/patients including, but not limited to, clients'/patients' homes, physician or public health clinics, long term care facilities, lodges, retirement homes and/or schools.

Adequate Date: Written records containing a minimum of a year and month are considered adequate.

Inadequate immunization documentation: No written documentation of immunization, illegible documentation OR written immunization records that have less than a month and year as the date and / or incomplete vaccine information.

General Statement:

Health Care Workers are eligible for publicly funded vaccines based on guidelines and criteria established by AH. **Eligibility for immunization is based on the HCWs related activities or potential work related activities that put them at occupational risk of infection.**

Section 1: Responsibility of the Employer

It is the responsibility of the employer to:

- Assess the immunization status of each HCW at the time of initial enrollment.
- Obtain full immunization history including documentation of the doses received and adequate dates of administration for all routine immunizations and other vaccines received.
- Offer immunization at the earliest opportunity to HCW with inadequate documentation or without evidence of adequate immunity where applicable (e.g., hepatitis B, varicella vaccine).
- Maintain records of all immunizations and serologic tests.
- Institute an immunization recall system when necessary.

AH provides vaccines recommended for occupational health reasons at no charge. To ensure all HCWs are fully immunized AHS encourages employers to have an occupational health service that includes the provision of appropriate occupational vaccines on employment.

If an employer does not have an occupational health program, it is reasonable for an outside provider to charge fees **to the employer** for the provision of the services required to assess and immunize the HCW including assessment of immunization history and status, referral and review of lab results if applicable, administration of vaccines indicated and recommendation for follow up serology if necessary. Fees cannot be charged for the cost of provincially funded vaccines. The *Communicable Diseases Regulation, Alberta Regulation 238/1985: Section 2.1(4)* legislates that the individual employee cannot be charged for the vaccine.

Section 2: Responsibility of the Employee

It is the responsibility of the HCW (employee) to:

- Initiate and follow through with the assessment of their immunization status with their occupational health program.
- Provide their employer a full immunization history including documentation of the vaccine doses received and dates of administration.
- Follow through with recommended immunizations to ensure adequate protection against vaccine preventable diseases.
- Maintain their immunization record(s) as a part of their personal health care information.

HCWs are accountable to provide this documentation to employers and may need to refer to this information over the years, as part of their ongoing health status.

Immunizations Recommended for Health Care Workers Chart outlines vaccines routinely recommended as related to occupational risk for HCWs. Special vaccines needed during exceptional circumstances or vaccines that are recommended for adults based on age or other individual risk factors are not addressed in this standard.

References:

1. Alberta Health, Health System Accountability and Performance Division, *Alberta Immunization Policy*. (2021 April) Occupational Considerations for Immunization.
2. Alberta Health, (2011-2012) Public Health Notifiable Disease Management Guidelines, Edmonton Alberta. <http://www.health.alberta.ca/professionals/notifiable-diseases-guide.html>
3. National Advisory Committee on Immunization. (2012). *Canadian immunization guide (Evergreen Edition)*. Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency of Canada. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/cig-gci/>
4. British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (January 2010). *Immunization Program Section III-Immunization of Special Populations, Section VII-Biological Products*. In Communicable disease control manual. <http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/comm-manual/CDManualChap2.htm>.
5. Ministry of Health (2007). *Canadian Tuberculosis Standards (6th ed)*. Ottawa ON: Tuberculosis Prevention and Control, Public Health Agency of Canada, The Canadian Lung Association. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tbpc-latb/pubs/tbstand07-eng.php>.
6. CDC. *Immunization of Health-Care Personnel: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)*. MMWR 2011;60(7):1-46. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr6007.pdf>.
7. Province of Alberta, Public Health Act, Communicable Diseases (CD) Regulation, Alberta Regulation 238/1985.
8. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2008, November). *Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals*. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/ic-ci/index-eng.php>