

September 24, 2020

Preparation for Influenza Outbreaks – Edmonton Zone

Dear Site Owner/Operator,

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 guardians advising of the need to obtain an antiviral prescription from their physician in advance of an influenza outbreak;
- Work in collaboration with AHS staff at your site (if applicable) to arrange for advance antiviral prescriptions to be in place for all of the residents through their responsible physician and pharmacy;
- Compile or update a master list / Influenza Outbreak Tracking Tool of all individuals living in the building in preparation to influenza season;
- Provision of notice about influenza immunization to all staff; and
- Creation and maintenance of a staff immunization list.

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 the outbreak season will be dispensed at no charge once a confirmed influenza outbreak has been declared.
- Community pharmacists will deliver medications to your site.
- CDC nursing will advise the outbreak site designate(s) to use the master list / Influenza Outbreak Resident Tracking Tool to determine which residents are not receiving antiviral prophylaxis and whether this is due to the resident's refusal or resident/physician oversight. If it is the latter, work in collaboration with AHS staff at the site (if applicable) 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 AHS staff at your site (if applicable) to distribute the letter **labeled #1** to all residents or their guardians at your site. Please also distribute this letter to any new residents admitted to your site during the influenza season [September 1 to April 30].
- Arranging advance prescriptions for residents through their physicians**
Work in collaboration with AHS staff at your site (if applicable) to ensure advance antiviral prescriptions are in place for all of the residents through their responsible physician and pharmacy.
 - **For residents on an AHS SL caseload (as per SL direction for the 2020-2021 season):** in addition, the owner/operator will also assist with arranging advance antiviral prescriptions for residents on an SL caseload by working with the resident's physician and pharmacy.
 - **For residents on AHS HL caseload (and as done in previous years):** AHS HL will arrange for advance prescriptions for residents that are on an HL caseload only. The operator should distribute the resident letter to ensure that all other residents see their responsible physician to get an antiviral prescription.

CDC nursing will be distributing a letter to all physicians in the Edmonton Zone detailing this process. If your 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 or update a master list / Influenza Outbreak Resident Tracking Tool of all individuals living in the building 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 this purpose or if one has been provided to you by AHS staff, it can be used instead.** This master list / Influenza Outbreak Resident Tracking Tool is to be used in the event of an outbreak for implementing antiviral prophylaxis. Where there are AHS clients, AHS nursing staff would maintain medical information on these clients. **Please confirm with AHS staff at your site (if applicable) if this is being done.** 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 letter addressed to staff**
Please provide the letter **labeled #3** to all staff, including those 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.