

September 24, 2020

Staff Notice: Influenza Immunization and Antiviral Prescriptions for Possible Influenza Outbreaks

Influenza viruses circulate throughout our communities every year. Last year's vaccine will not provide adequate protection for the upcoming influenza season.

Annual influenza immunization is the best way to prevent influenza and its severe complications.

Transmission of influenza from infected Healthcare Workers (HCWs) to their vulnerable patients results in significant morbidity and mortality. Influenza immunization for HCWs who have direct patient contact is a component of the standard of care for the protection of patients. This year's vaccine will be available in October, pending vaccine availability. Immunization is strongly recommended for everyone over 6 months of age and is available, without charge, to all Albertans.

Even with good immunization rates, influenza outbreaks may occur in congregate living sites. When an influenza outbreak is declared, the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) recommends that all residents, whether immunized or not, receive antiviral prophylaxis with oseltamivir. **The MOH also recommends that staff take antiviral prophylaxis as appropriate. Staff who are not adequately immunized with influenza vaccine 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.**

To avoid interruption in employment and to facilitate prompt implementation of antiviral prophylaxis you should:

1. **Get your annual influenza immunization.** Find out if immunization clinics will be held at your site in the fall so you can plan to attend. Alternatively, you can receive it from your physician or community pharmacist. If you cannot get it from a physician or community pharmacist, please contact Health Link at 811 to arrange an appointment with Public Health.
 - If there is an influenza outbreak at your site and you have received your annual influenza immunization greater than 14 days prior to the influenza outbreak, antiviral prophylaxis is not required and you may continue to work.
2. **Let your employer know if you have received your influenza immunization** so they can keep an accurate and up-to-date record of immunized and unimmunized staff in the event of an influenza outbreak.
3. **If you have not received your annual influenza immunization, be prepared to obtain a prescription for antiviral prophylaxis from your physician.** 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 who work in congregate living settings are not eligible for publicly funded antivirals under this policy.** Your employer must have a process in place in regards to coverage of cost of antiviral prophylaxis.
 - 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 department at the time of an influenza outbreak for assessment and advice.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Chris Sikora MD MSc MPH CCFP FRCPC
Lead Medical Officer of Health
Alberta Health Services – Edmonton Zone