

Influenza Prevention Policy

1. Introduction

Description

Influenza can be a serious contagious disease spread by droplet transmission through close contact with an infected individual. The Public Health Agency of Canada estimates that in a given year there are an average of 12,200 hospitalizations related to influenza¹⁻³ and approximately 3,500 deaths attributable to influenza.⁴ Infected individuals are highly contagious and can transmit influenza for 24 hours before they are symptomatic.

Among vaccine-preventable diseases, influenza causes by far the most deaths, outpacing all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined. Hospitalized patients are frequently more vulnerable to influenza than members of the general population. Influenza in vulnerable groups, especially the elderly, the very young and the immunosuppressed, is associated with significant morbidity and mortality. It is a major contributor to hospitalizations in winter.

Health care workers have been implicated as the source of influenza in health care settings. Vaccination of health care workers will reduce their risk of getting influenza and spreading it to patients. The most effective strategy for preventing influenza is annual vaccination. Influenza vaccine is safe and effective.

The wearing of procedure masks can serve as a method of source control of infected health care workers who may have had no symptoms. Procedure masks may also protect unvaccinated health care workers from as yet unrecognized infected patients or visitors with influenza.

Other infection control measures such as rapid identification of ill patients, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, restrictions on work and visiting, and the use of anti-viral medications all help but vaccination remains the cornerstone of efforts to control influenza transmission.

Scope

This policy applies to all Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) Staff members who attend or may attend a Patient Care Location.

This policy also applies to visitors who attend a Patient Care Location.

2. Policy

2.1. Policy Statement

All individuals covered by this policy must be vaccinated annually against Influenza or wear a procedure mask during the Policy Application Period when in a Patient Care Location in accordance with this policy. During an Influenza outbreak, the MHO may implement additional influenza prevention and control measures.

2.2. Responsibilities

2.2.1. Staff

All Staff members:

- Must annually advise VCH of their Influenza immunization status in a manner acceptable to VCH by the Policy Application Date.
- If unimmunized during the Policy Application Period, must wear a procedure mask provided by VCH while at a Patient Care Location. Staff will be responsible for maintaining their mask in good condition in accordance with VCH protocols.
- Must continue to use personal protective equipment and abide by VCH's infection control practices to prevent the transmission of communicable disease, including Influenza.
- Who experience Influenza-like illness/respiratory infection, must follow VCH's established reporting protocol by calling the Employee Absence Call Line.
- Who witness any instances of non-compliance with this policy will report the incident of non-compliance immediately to their supervisor.

2.2.2. Visitors

Visitors who are not vaccinated against Influenza are required to wear a procedure mask provided by VCH while at a Patient Care Location. VCH will inform visitors of the requirements of this policy by means of posters and will make procedure masks available to visitors.

2.3. Compliance

Any Staff member found in violation of this policy may be subject to remedial and/or disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment, cancellation of contract and/or revocation of privileges.

Any Visitor found in violation of this policy may be denied access to Patient Care Locations.

3. References

1. Schanzer DL, Mcgeer A, Morris K. Statistical estimates of respiratory admissions attributable to seasonal and pandemic influenza for Canada. *Influenza and other Respiratory Viruses*. 2013;7(5):799-808.
2. Schanzer DL, Langley JM, Tam TWS. Role of influenza and other respiratory viruses in admissions of adults to Canadian hospitals. *Influenza and other Respiratory Viruses*. 2008;2(1):1-8.

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3. Schanzer DL, Langley JM, Tam TW. Hospitalization attributable to influenza and other viral respiratory illnesses in Canadian children. *Pediatr Infect Dis J*. 2006;25(0891-3668; 0891-3668; 9):795-800.
4. Schanzer DL, Sevenhuysen C, Winchester B, et al. Estimating influenza deaths in Canada, 1992-2009. *PLoS ONE*. 2013;8(11).

Related Policies

- [Baseline Health/Immunization Assessment](#)

Definitions

“**Influenza**” is a viral infection of the respiratory system. Symptoms of influenza include fever, cough, sore throat, muscle ache, extreme fatigue and headache. Unlike the common cold and most other respiratory viruses commonly called “the flu”, influenza virus infection can result in severe illness, pneumonia and even death. The incubation period of influenza is one to three days; the duration of virus shedding is usually not more than five days after onset of symptoms.

“**Patient Care Location**” includes any building, property, or site owned, leased, rented or operated by VCH where there are clients who are receiving care; and any client home or other location where covered individuals interact with clients in the course of their work for VCH. This does not include any location designated by VCH to be excluded from this definition.

“**Policy Application Date**” is the date established annually by the Provincial Health Officer after which all persons covered under this policy are required to be vaccinated against influenza or wear a mask in accordance with this policy. The Vaccination Required Date will usually be no later than the first week of December.

“**Policy Application Period**” is a period of time determined by the Provincial Health Officer and starting on the Vaccination Required Date. The Policy Application Period will usually be from the beginning of December until the end of March but may vary with seasonal epidemiology and will also include any period of time relating to novel strains of influenza. During this period, Covered Individuals will be required to be vaccinated against influenza or wear a surgical/procedure mask in accordance with this policy.

“**Staff**” means all employees (including management and leadership), medical staff (including physicians, midwives, dentists and nurse practitioners), residents, fellows and trainees, health care professionals, students, volunteers, contractors and other service providers engaged by VCH.

Questions

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