

Influenza Prevention Policy

Frequently Asked Questions

Contractors and Health Service Providers

Influenza – or the flu – can be a serious contagious disease, which is spread by droplet transmission through close contact with an infected person. Infected individuals are highly contagious and can transmit the virus for 24 hours before they show any symptoms.

Each year, there are approximately 3,500 deaths from influenza and its complications across Canada. Influenza causes by far the most deaths among vaccine-preventable diseases, outpacing all others combined. Hospitalized patients and seniors in residential care are more vulnerable to influenza than healthy adults. The vaccine is also less effective in the elderly and those with compromised immune systems, making it even more important that their caregivers are vaccinated.

Infected health care providers can pass the virus on to their patients before they even know they are sick. The most effective way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated and adopting additional preventative measures, such as proper hand hygiene and proper sneezing and coughing etiquette. Immunization helps physicians, health care providers and those who come into regular contact with patients reduce their risk of contracting influenza and spreading it to their patients.

To protect patients in our facilities, in 2012 British Columbia's health authorities adopted the Influenza Prevention Policy, requiring all employees, students, physicians, residents, **contractors**, vendors and volunteers to get immunized or to wear a mask during influenza season when in a patient care area. To further protect patients, the policy was expanded to include all visitors to our health care facilities.

The policy applies to ALL contractors, who work in Health Authority owned and operated patient care settings, such as hospitals residential/long-term care homes and community health care centres.

In addition, the policy applies to contracted agencies that receive health authority funding support AND provide patient care or patient care services in the community. Table below delineates contracted agencies that provide services in the community by policy application (yes or no).

Policy applies to the following contracted facilities or services provided in the community
<p>LTCF (licensed)</p> <p>Mental health housing (licensed)</p> <p>Addictions housing (licensed)</p> <p>Hospice (licensed)</p> <p>Acquired injury (licensed)</p> <p>Equipment loans programs</p> <p>Addictions counselors doing individual or group therapy</p> <p>Home support services (personal care, medication assistance, dietary) that may be provided in assisted living facilities</p>
Policy applies, however, facilities can apply for temporary exemption*
<p>Community living homes (licensed)</p>
Policy applies based on individual case review by Health Authority (Policy applies if health care is provided to majority of residents)
<p>Child and youth residential (licensed)</p> <p>Assisted living facilities</p>
Policy does not apply to the entire facility, though policy will apply to HA funded or employed health care workers providing care within the facility
<p>Supportive housing for seniors</p> <p>Smaller detox housing (not licensed)</p> <p>Emergency shelters</p> <p>Drop in day shelters</p> <p>Meal programs (meals on wheels, community kitchen)</p> <p>Group education sessions</p> <p>Adult day centres</p> <p>Childhood Development Centres</p> <p>Child care centres</p>

How do I comply with the Influenza Prevention Policy this year?

As a contractor and health service provider, you are covered by the policy, and must get a vaccination or wear a mask in patient care areas during the required vaccination period. Please report your vaccination or mask choice to your supervisor.

By reporting your flu vaccination or decision to mask, you are in compliance with the policy for the rest of the influenza season. If you report that you choose to decline vaccination, you will be required to wear a surgical/procedure mask in patient care areas for the duration of the influenza season to comply with the policy.

What is a patient care area?

A patient care area/location is defined as an area within a health care facility, including a contracted facility, hallway or lobby, which is accessible to patients, residents or clients who are there to access care or services.

It includes any other location where care is provided, such as home and community care locations (including a client's home). It does not include locations such as administrative areas or private offices, which are not generally accessed by patients, residents or clients.

I work in a counselling role with my clients. Am I covered by this policy?

Yes, you are covered by the policy and must get a vaccination or wear a mask during the required vaccination period. The policy applies whether you are providing services in an office, home or community environment.

I work in an administrative role and do not provide direct patient/client care. Am I covered by this policy?

Yes, you are covered by the policy anytime you are in a patient care area.

For example, if you work in an office environment where there are no patients or clients, you are not required to be vaccinated or wear a mask. However, if you work in an office environment where patients or clients might be present, you are required to be vaccinated or to wear a mask.

You are also required to vaccinate or mask anytime you leave your office and go into a patient care area such as a public hallway or washroom, or any other area where there are patients or clients present.

Am I covered by this policy if I am providing a non-health related service to a health authority, such as construction or courier services?

Yes, you are covered by the policy anytime you are in a patient care area.

What is the required vaccination period?

The required vaccination period will be declared by the provincial health officer – usually at the beginning of December, and will typically last until the end of March. During this period, all contractors and health service providers must have received a flu vaccination or wear a mask. All visitors will be asked to wear a mask if they haven't received a flu shot.

When and where do I have to wear a mask?

While the most effective way to prevent the transmission of influenza is to receive a flu shot, if you are not vaccinated you must wear a procedure mask whenever you are in a patient care area during the required vaccination period.

What type of mask should I wear?

Procedure masks are recognized for use in this policy. These have been shown to be effective in preventing the transmission of influenza.

When do masks need to be changed?

Simply change your mask when it gets overly moist – there is no set time designated when you need to change your mask.

It is important that you dispose of your used masks appropriately. Please dispose of masks in an available garbage can, and follow proper hand hygiene protocols before replacing with a new mask.

Where can I get my flu shot?

There are many places that you can get immunized:

- At your own doctor's office
- At a local pharmacy

You can find a flu clinic by calling 8-1-1 or visiting the flu clinic locator at www.health.gov.bc.ca/flu/.

How much does it cost to get vaccinated?

There is no charge for the flu shot if you identify yourself as a health care provider, regardless of where you receive the vaccine.