

Flu Immunization - Registered Nurse Responsibilities

Published December 2020

Flu season is a challenging time of year for many registered nurses (RNs). When asked to participate in an influenza immunization program, nurses need to have a clear understanding of their professional accountability and responsibilities.

In Alberta, influenza immunization can be obtained through public health clinics, some physician offices, health-care institutions, private agencies, and specific community settings (e.g., pharmacies). The public health sector, under the auspices of the local Medical Officer of Health, is accountable for the implementation of influenza immunization programs according to provincial requirements. The safety and quality of these services rest with the health professional providing the flu immunization program oversight and the RN or other health professional who administers the vaccine.

Direction for RNs

The College of Registered Nurses of Alberta's (CRNA) *Practice Standards for Regulated Members* (2013) provides direction to RNs who are involved in flu immunization programs by emphasizing the following responsibilities:

- The nurse is accountable at all times for their own actions.
- The nurse follows current legislation, standards, and policies relevant to their practice setting.
- The nurse questions policies and procedures inconsistent with therapeutic client outcomes, best practices, and safety standards.
- The nurse practices competently.
- The nurse supports decisions with evidence-based rationale.
- The nurse uses appropriate information and resources that enhance client care and achievement of desired client outcomes.
- The nurse collaborates with the client, significant others, and other members of the health-care team regarding activities of care planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- The nurse participates in quality improvement activities.
- The nurse practices within their own level of competence.
- The nurse regularly assesses their practice and takes the necessary steps to improve personal competence.
- The nurse engages in and supports others in the continuing competence process.

Immunization safety

Influenza immunization is more than performing the psychomotor task of giving an injection. Safe flu immunization requires

- knowledge, skill, and judgment to assess the appropriateness of administering the flu vaccine to an individual client, including attending appropriate orientation as required;
- sharing with the client the risks and benefits of receiving and not receiving the vaccine;
- careful client assessment for anaphylaxis risk such as previous anaphylaxis, severe allergy to any component of the vaccine or to latex;
- compliance with the recommended dose, route, site, and schedule for administering the vaccine;
- vaccine handling and storage according to the vaccine manufacturers package insert and employer policy, as per Alberta Health's *Alberta Vaccine Cold Chain (AVCC) Policy*;
- knowledge of the vaccine action, interactions, minor side-effects, and potential adverse events;
- monitoring the client during and following vaccine administration; and
- managing side-effects or adverse effects of the vaccine, and reporting adverse events as per the *Alberta Health Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) Policy*.

RN accountable and responsibilities

RNs involved in a flu immunization program must ensure that

- there is medical oversight of the flu immunization program or there is an established program that integrates the components of a high-quality immunization program and is overseen by a health professional with authorization to dispense the flu vaccine (e.g., pharmacist);
- a client assessment for contraindications to vaccination is completed;
- informed consent is obtained from the client;
- they are competent to administer the vaccine;
- the expiry date of the vaccine has been checked;
- the vaccine has been inspected for any irregularities (e.g., particulate matter or damage);
- hand hygiene is performed properly;
- the dose and route of immunization are correct;
- the correct needle gauge and length are being used in the correct site;

- they provide the client with appropriate after care instructions including a phone number to discuss unexpected local reactions or other adverse events;
- they monitor and report adverse events promptly and accurately;
- they appropriately document the administration of the vaccine;
- they are prepared to manage any adverse reactions; and
- they comply with safe vaccine management and storage practices.

Informed consent

The Canadian Nurses Association *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (2008) emphasizes that nurses "... provide persons in their care with the information they need to make informed decisions related to their health and well-being". To give informed consent, the client must be provided with the information necessary to make the decision to consent to or refuse the flu vaccine. This information must include the following:

- expected risks and benefits of receiving and not receiving the vaccine
- contraindications to vaccination

The RN involved in a flu immunization program is responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure that informed consent is obtained. If the client is incapable of giving consent, a substitute decision-maker must provide consent. Consent can be written or oral.

Safe and competent administration of flu vaccines

Essential immunization competencies that support RN practice include

- communicating effectively about flu immunization, as relevant to the practice setting(s);
- implementing Canadian guidelines when storing, handling, or transporting vaccines;
- preparing and administering flu vaccines correctly;
- anticipating, identifying, and managing adverse events following immunization, as appropriate to the practice setting;
- documenting information relevant to each immunization encounter in accordance with national guidelines for immunization practices and jurisdictional health information processes; and
- recognizing and responding to the unique immunization needs of certain population groups.
- Information

The Public Health Agency of Canada has outlined *Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals* (2008) needed by health-care professionals to administer immunizations in Canada.

For further information on immunization programs, see CRNA's *Quality Immunization Programs* (2020).