



Influenza Control Program Policy

A. Background

Influenza can be a serious contagious disease spread by droplet transmission through close contact with an infected individual. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, nationally there are between 2000 and 8000 deaths per year from influenza and its complications. 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.

Healthcare workers have been implicated as the source of influenza in healthcare settings. Vaccination of healthcare 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 masks can serve as a method of source control of infected healthcare workers who may have had no symptoms. Masks may also protect unvaccinated healthcare 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.

B. Policy Statement

All individuals covered by this Policy must be vaccinated annually against influenza or wear a surgical/procedure mask during influenza season when in a patient care area in accordance with this Policy. During an influenza outbreak, this Policy is suspended at the outbreak location and Northern Health's outbreak policies will apply.

C. Scope

This policy applies to all Northern Health employees (unionized and excluded), other credentialed professionals (including physicians), residents, volunteers, students, contractors, and vendors (collectively, these individuals are referred to as “Covered Individuals”) who attend a Patient Care Location.

This policy also applies to any other persons who attend a Patient Care Location (these individuals are referred to as “Visitors”).

D. Responsibilities

1. All Covered Individuals must annually advise Northern Health of their influenza immunization status in a manner acceptable to Northern Health by the Vaccination Required Date.
2. During the annual Vaccination Required Period, Covered Individuals and Visitors who are not vaccinated against influenza are required to wear a surgical/procedural mask provided by Northern Health while at a Patient Care Location. Individuals required to wear a surgical/procedural mask will be responsible for maintaining their mask in good condition in accordance with Northern Health protocols. During an influenza outbreak, this Policy is suspended at the outbreak location and Northern Health outbreak policies will apply.
3. Covered Individuals should continue to use personal protective equipment and abide by Northern Health infection control practices to prevent the transmission of communicable disease, including influenza.
4. Covered Individuals who experience influenza like illness/respiratory infection should follow Northern Health established reporting protocols.
5. Covered Individuals who witness any instances of non-compliance with this policy are expected to report the incident of non-compliance immediately to their supervisor.
6. Northern Health will inform Visitors of the requirements of this Policy and will make surgical/procedure masks available to Visitors.

E. Definitions

Vaccination Required Date

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.

Vaccination Required Period

A period of time determined by the Provincial Health Officer and starting on the Vaccination Required Date. The Vaccination Required Period will usually be from the end of November 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 the Vaccination Required Period, Covered Individuals will be required to be vaccinated against influenza or wear a surgical/procedure mask in accordance with this Policy.

Patient Care Location

Patient Care Location includes:

- a. any building, property, or site owned, leased, rented or operated by Northern Health where there are patients, residents or clients who are receiving care; and
- b. any patient/client/resident home or other location where Covered Individuals interact with the patient/client/resident in the course of his/her work for Northern Health

but does not include any location designated by Northern Health to be excluded from the definition of Patient Care Location.

F. Consequences of Non-Compliance

Any Covered Individual 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