

# Practice Guideline

## Influenza Vaccinations

### Introduction

Flu season is a busy time of year for nurses.<sup>1</sup> Many find themselves being asked to provide vaccinations to clients,<sup>2</sup> the public, family, friends and colleagues. To ensure nurses are prepared, it is important that they review their accountability and responsibilities in such situations.

### Administering vaccines

Before administering a vaccination to a client, colleague or family member, a nurse must consider four issues:

- if informed consent has been obtained;
- if a prescription/medical directive is in place;
- if she or he is competent to deliver and manage the vaccine; and
- how the administration will be documented.

### Informed consent

According to the *Health Care Consent Act* and the College of Nurses of Ontario (the College) standards, nurses are accountable for obtaining consent for the interventions they provide. Consent for flu vaccination must relate to the treatment being proposed, be informed, be voluntary, and not have been obtained through misrepresentation or fraud.

To give informed consent, the client must be provided with the information necessary to make a decision to consent to or refuse the vaccine. This information must include the following:

- the nature of the treatment;
- expected benefits of the treatment;
- material risks and adverse effects of the treatment;
- alternative courses of action; and
- likely consequences of not having the treatment.

The health care practitioner proposing the treatment is responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure that consent is obtained. In some cases, the nurse obtaining the informed consent may not be the nurse administering the vaccine. This is acceptable as long as the administering nurse reasonably believes that informed consent has been obtained before she/he provides the vaccination.

If the client is incapable of giving consent, the substitute decision-maker must provide consent.

Consent can be written or oral. Nurses should document that consent was obtained, either by using a consent form or by recording it in the health record.

### Prescriptions and directives

A prescription by a health care professional with the authority to prescribe the vaccine (either an NP or a physician) is needed before the vaccine can be administered. This can take the form of a client-specific order, which is a prescription for an individual client, or a directive. A directive is an order from an NP or physician that is applicable to a range of clients who meet certain conditions.

The directive must include the following:

- the specific medication (in this case, both the vaccine and treatment for an anaphylactic reaction);
- specific condition(s) that must be met; and
- any specific circumstance(s) that must exist before the directive can be implemented.

The directive must have the name and signature of the physician or NP authorizing the directive, and the date and signature of any administrative authority that is approving the directive. For more information about

<sup>1</sup> In this document, *nurse* refers to Registered Practical Nurse (RPN), Registered Nurse (RN) and Nurse Practitioner (NP).

<sup>2</sup> In this document, a *client* may be an individual, family, community or group.

directives, see the College's *Directives and Authorizing Mechanisms* practice guidelines and the *Decisions About Procedures and Authority, Revised 2006* practice standard.

## Accountability

Nurses are accountable for the administration and outcome of all care they provide, including giving flu vaccines in any setting. The College's *Medication, Revised 2008* practice standard provides standards for nurses to administer medications safely and effectively in all practice settings. The following factors must be considered by nurses when determining the appropriateness of administering the vaccine.

1. Do you have the knowledge, skill and judgment required to assess the appropriateness of the vaccine? Nurses need to understand:
  - the indications and contraindications; and
  - the risks involved and expected outcomes of vaccination.
2. Do you have the knowledge, skill and judgment required to take appropriate action before, during and after the administration of the vaccine?
3. Do you have the knowledge, skill and judgment required to assess for negative outcomes?
4. Do you have the resources to intervene if required? In case of anaphylaxis, this means having an anaphylaxis kit available (includes epinephrine or adrenaline and the appropriate medical directive) and being able to manage this outcome, or having someone readily available who is able to manage it.

Nurses may administer the flu vaccine to their colleagues if the employer approves this practice and provides the necessary supports to meet the standards of practice. It is important to recognize that by administering the vaccine, the nurse is establishing a nurse-client relationship with the colleague and must keep any information obtained in the course of providing the treatment confidential. The College's *Confidentiality and Privacy—Personal Health Information* practice standard provides an overview of Ontario's current legislation, clarifies nursing standards

for confidentiality and privacy of personal health information. For more information about the nurse-client relationship, refer to the College's *Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship, Revised 2006* practice standard.

## Documentation

Documentation is integral to safe and effective nursing practice in all settings. The principles of documentation are included in the College's *Documentation, Revised 2008* practice standard and apply to the administration of flu vaccine. Records must be kept that accurately reflect the care given.

## Workplace vaccination

Some employers may require that nurses be vaccinated each year during flu season. The College does not establish the requirements for immunization of health care workers. These requirements are established by individual workplaces and by legislation.

The College recognizes that immunization is a key measure in reducing nurses' susceptibility to certain diseases, including influenza and hepatitis. It recommends that all nurses review their immunization status to ensure that they are appropriately immunized.

## For more information

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