



Immunization for Health Care Workers in B.C.

Why is immunization important for health care workers?

Health care workers are at risk of exposure to communicable diseases in the workplace.

Many diseases can be prevented with vaccination. Getting vaccinated protects your health and prevents disease transmission between you and your patients, and between you and your family and friends.

What routine immunizations are recommended in B.C.?

The vaccines recommended for health care workers are diphtheria and tetanus, polio, hepatitis B, measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), varicella and influenza. All are provided free to health care workers in B.C.

Immunization of employees is the responsibility of the Occupational Health department or assigned staff in the workplace. The employer and employee should keep records of all immunizations and laboratory test results.

Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Polio

Primary immunization with polio vaccine is recommended for all health care workers. Most adults will have completed a primary series of polio vaccine in childhood. If you think that you have not received the vaccine, then a primary series of polio vaccine is recommended.

Immunization against diphtheria and tetanus is recommended for all adults in Canada. Booster doses with tetanus/diphtheria toxoids are recommended every 10 years. These should be

given sooner if the individual gets a dirty or major wound, including a bite.

Diphtheria is a serious communicable disease, causing death in 5 to 10 per cent of cases, with the highest rates among the very young and the elderly.

Tetanus is an acute and often fatal disease, but one that is now rare in Canada. Cases are associated with dirty wounds, animal bites and contaminated drug injection equipment.

In Canada, individuals at risk of getting polio are those who come in contact with people from countries where polio is present. Individuals travelling to these countries may be exposed to polio and should be vaccinated. While some polio infections may not result in symptoms, others can result in paralysis and even death.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella

Measles: Protection against measles infection requires proof of receiving two doses of a measles-containing vaccine or proof that you have had laboratory-confirmed measles disease in the past. Those born before 1957 have probably had measles disease and, therefore, they are considered immune.

Measles is a highly contagious disease that can be more severe in infants, children and adults who have weakened immune systems. It is very infectious.

Mumps: Protection against mumps requires proof of receiving 1 dose of mumps-containing vaccine for those born between 1957 and 1969, or 2 doses for those born after 1969. Individuals born before 1957 have probably

had mumps and, therefore, they are considered immune.

Mumps is generally a mild disease. However, complications are more common in adults, including encephalitis, which is an infection of the brain matter.

Rubella: Health care workers should receive the appropriate number of doses of MMR vaccine to be protected. Individuals are considered protected against rubella infection if they have proof of having one dose of rubella vaccine or proof they have had laboratory-confirmed rubella disease, regardless of their year of birth.

Rubella infection in adults may cause swelling and pain in the joints. Infections in the first 3 months of pregnancy have an 85 per cent risk of causing severe harm to a developing baby. Babies may be born with damage to their sight, hearing, heart and/or brain. Rubella outbreaks in health care facilities are of concern due to the potential spread to pregnant health care workers and patients.

Hepatitis B Virus Infection

Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for health care workers who may be exposed to infectious blood or body fluids. All health care workers who have potential exposure to hepatitis B virus should consult their Occupational Health department for a risk assessment and testing. If exposed, they will be offered preventive treatment.

Individuals who have completed the hepatitis B vaccine series and have a lab test result indicating immunity are considered immune. Those who do not develop immunity (non-responders) to an initial vaccine series should be offered a second series of vaccine. To check for immunity, testing for antibodies should be done 1-6 months after completion of the vaccine series.

Varicella

Varicella vaccine is recommended for health care workers who do not have evidence of

immunity against chickenpox. Evidence of immunity consists of a self-reported history of chickenpox after 12 months of age or of shingles, a lab test result indicating immunity, or documentation of an age-appropriate series of varicella vaccine.

Varicella (chickenpox) infection tends to be more severe in adults. Individuals whose disease history is uncertain should have tests to determine susceptibility. Those who are susceptible to varicella should receive 2 doses of the vaccine, given 1 month apart.

Influenza

Annual influenza vaccine is recommended for health care workers. All health care workers are at risk of getting and spreading the influenza virus to their patients, families and friends. It is important to prevent spreading the virus to people at high risk of complications from influenza, such as the elderly or those with cardiac or pulmonary disorders, weakened immune systems or other chronic medical conditions.

Evidence shows that influenza vaccination of health care workers helps reduce illness and complications among patients in long-term care settings and helps reduce illness among employees during the influenza season.



BC Centre for Disease Control
AN AGENCY OF THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.