Opportunities for Immunization

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The *National Guidelines for Immunization Practices* were developed to provide a standard of practice that will ensure vaccines are handled properly and administered by competent immunizers delivered to all children as recommended by provincial and territorial programs. These guidelines are recommended for use by all health professionals who administer vaccines or manage immunization services for infants and children. Some of the guidelines will be more applicable to particular settings or situations, but all should be considered in reviewing current practices. Community providers and local health officials should cooperate in their efforts to assure high coverage rates in the community to achieve and maintain the highest possible degree of community protection against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Each encounter with a health care provider, including those that occur during hospitalization, is an opportunity to review the individual’s immunization status. In Alberta, special programs do not exist to identify adults requiring routine immunization other than individuals at high risk, the elderly and those in certain occupations. However, opportunities exist within the health system to review the immunization status of children and adults: for example, travel clinics, infant/child immunization clinics, physicians’ offices, in hospitals and in workplaces. AHS should encourage physicians to review the immunization histories of their patients at the first medical visit (particularly rubella and varicella for women of child-bearing age) and at regular intervals thereafter. AHS Zones should also ensure that convenient access to immunization is available to children and adults, including the provision of certain vaccines to community partners for adult immunization when warranted (e.g., influenza, pneumococcal polysaccharide, dTap, and Td vaccines). Cooperative efforts among public health professionals, acute care institutions, long-term care institutions and physicians are essential to the success of influenza, pneumococcal and other targeted immunization programs.

**Acute Care Facilities**

- Immunization status should be reviewed at each hospital admission, and if the individual is eligible for vaccines by age or health status, the immunization should be given before discharge, or a referral to the appropriate community immunization clinic should be completed.\(^1\)

- The best opportunity for immunization for some patients without regular sources of care or those followed in specialized outpatient clinics may be during hospitalization and/or at outpatient visits. Emergency room visits by children should be utilized to check immunization status and to arrange for immunization or make the appropriate referrals for immunization as necessary.

- Programs to immunize high-risk patients before discharge will ensure that they do not miss immunization in the community. Standing orders and departmental protocols can help reduce barriers to immunization in an acute care setting.

- Age groups targeted for immunization in acute care facilities include:
  - All patients – ensure up to date for all recommended immunizations and refer to public health clinics if immunization is needed.
  - Patients 65 years of age and older – pneumococcal vaccine and annual influenza vaccine
  - High risk (underlying medical conditions) – may be eligible for various vaccines. See Special Situations for Immunization – Immunization of Specific Populations.
  - Newborns born to mothers who are HBsAg carriers or who develop acute hepatitis B infection in the third trimester of pregnancy – hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) and first dose of hepatitis B vaccine. Refer to: *Alberta Prenatal Screening Program for Selected Communicable Diseases – Public Health Guidelines*.\(^2\)
  - Mothers susceptible to rubella or varicella. Refer to: *Alberta Prenatal Screening Program for Selected Communicable Diseases – Public Health Guidelines*.\(^2\)
  - Staff – Up to date with routine vaccines and annual influenza vaccine. See Provision of Occupational Vaccines.
Long-term Care Facilities

Long term/continuing care facilities should have an annual influenza immunization program in place to ensure that all residents are protected every year. A resident’s immunization status should be reviewed and updated on admission. All immunizations received should be documented on the resident's personal file. Specific groups to target include:

- Children living in residential or long-term care facilities – all age-appropriate routine immunizations.
- Adult and senior residents – pneumococcal vaccine and annual influenza vaccine for those 65 years of age and older and those with at-risk health conditions.
- Staff – up-to-date routine immunizations and annual influenza vaccine. See Provision of Occupational Vaccines.

Prenatal Screening

Prenatal screening identifies selected communicable diseases and provides suitable interventions to protect and enhance the health of pregnant women and their infants. Through this program, new mothers susceptible to rubella and varicella are identified and immunization is offered after delivery. Refer to: Alberta Prenatal Screening Program for Selected Communicable Diseases – Public Health Guidelines.

School Entry

The Student Record Regulation under the School Act provides school boards with the authority to disclose information from the student record to the MOH/designate upon written request for the purpose of contacting the parent of the student regarding voluntary health programs including immunization offered by AHS. This process facilitates contact with parents or guardians by public health nurses about immunization programs offered in schools. When operationally feasible, public health nurses in each AHS zone review the immunization status of students in grades 1, 5 and 9 every school year. Immunization records should also be obtained and reviewed on all children in school (grades 1 through 9) new to Canada. These students should be offered all age-appropriate vaccines needed to bring their immunizations up to date.

Post-secondary Educational Institutions

Entrance to post-secondary educational institutions is a convenient and appropriate time to review the immunization status of individuals and to offer any necessary vaccines. See Provision of Occupational Vaccines. The provider of immunization for students varies from institution to institution.

Occupational Settings

Assessment of immunization status of new employees may be part of the occupational health service provided by the employer. However, some occupations have particular risks for specific vaccine-preventable diseases (e.g., animal care and control workers, health care and laboratory workers). See Provision of Occupational Vaccines.

Child care workers should be up to date with recommended immunizations for adults including influenza vaccine. See Routine Immunization Schedule.

References