



# Influenza Prevention Policy

## 5.8.6P

POLICY

Policies are directing required organizational practice/behaviour



### Purpose:

In accordance with provincial expectations set out by the Ministry of Health and the Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC), all individuals covered by this policy are expected to be vaccinated annually against influenza or, wear a surgical/procedure mask during influenza season when in a patient care areas.

During an influenza outbreak, this policy is suspended at the outbreak location and Island Health's outbreak policies will apply.

### Scope:

- **Audience:** All Island Health staff (unionized and excluded), other credentialed professionals (including physicians), residents, volunteers, students, contractors, and vendors (collectively, these individuals are referred to as "Covered Individuals").

This policy also applies to any other persons who attend a patient care location (these individuals are referred to as "Visitors").

- **Environment**
  - Island-wide
  - All care Settings, including acute, long term care, community and out-patient settings
- **Exceptions:** For Speech/Language Pathologists (SLP) and Music Therapists (MT) or anyone whose mouth needs to be visible.

## 1.0 Policy

Influenza can be a serious contagious disease spread by droplet transmission through close contact with an Infected individual. The Public Health Agency of Canada estimates that in a given year there are an average of 12,200 hospitalizations related to influenza<sup>1-3</sup> and approximately 3,500 deaths attributable to influenza.<sup>4</sup> 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

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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.

All Covered Individuals (see definition) must annually advise Island Health of whether they have chosen to vaccinate by the policy application date.

**1.1** During the annual policy application period, Covered Individuals and Visitors who are not vaccinated against influenza are expected to wear a surgical/procedural mask provided by Island Health while at a patient care location. Individuals expected to wear a surgical/procedural mask will be responsible for maintaining their mask in good condition in accordance with Island Health’s protocols. During an influenza outbreak, this policy is suspended at the outbreak location and Island Health’s outbreak policies will apply.

**1.2** Covered Individuals should continue to use personal protective equipment and abide by Island Health’s infection control practices to prevent the transmission of communicable disease, including influenza.

**1.3** Covered Individuals who experience influenza like illness/respiratory infection should follow Island Health’s established reporting protocols.

**1.4** 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.

**1.5** Island Health will inform Visitors of the requirements of this policy and will make surgical/procedure masks available to visitors.

**1.6** Island Health will collect influenza vaccine coverage data for both healthcare workers and for long-term care facility residents, and report aggregate information to their respective health authority as per the provincial reporting form.

The mandatory aspect of the policy, requiring employees to either be vaccinated against influenza or wear a mask in patient care areas, is being suspended in favour of a more collaborative approach. The purpose of the Influenza Prevention Policy remains the same: to reduce death and illness from influenza by preventing the spread of influenza through immunization and appropriate use of masks by healthcare workers, patients and visitors in all healthcare settings. This collaborative approach aims to achieve this important goal while also recognizing the professionalism of healthcare employees and physicians.

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While unvaccinated health care workers will no longer face disciplinary penalties should they fail to wear masks in patient care areas during flu season, all health care workers must still report their immunization status. Failure to do so may still result in disciplinary measures.

Any Visitor found in violation of this policy may be denied access to patient care locations.

### 2.0 Monitoring and Evaluation

Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) is the provider of vaccine and influenza education. OHS is not responsible for monitoring and compliance of this policy. Monitoring for compliance and evaluation of the policy implementation, remains the responsibility of the program leadership.

The content of this policy will be reviewed in accordance with provincial expectations.

### 3.0 Definitions

**Policy Application Date:** The date established annually by the Provincial Health Officer after which all persons covered under this policy are expected to be vaccinated against influenza or wear a mask in accordance with this policy. The policy application date will usually be no later than the first week of December.

**Policy Application Period:** A period of time determined by the Provincial Health Officer which starts on the policy application date. The policy application 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 policy application period, Covered Individuals will be expected to be vaccinated against influenza or wear a surgical/procedure mask in accordance with this policy.

**Covered Individuals:** All Island Health employees (unionized and excluded), other credentialed professionals (including physicians), residents, volunteers, students, contractors, and vendors who attend or may attend a patient care location.

#### **Patient Care Location:**

- a. Any building, property, or site owned, leased, rented or operated by Island 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 Island Health;

### 4..0 References

- [HEABC – Changes to Provincial Influenza Prevention Policy Legislation](#)

Schanzer DL, Mcgeer A, Morris K. Statistical estimates of respiratory admissions attributable to seasonal and pandemic influenza for Canada. *Influenza and other Respiratory Viruses*. 2013;7(5):799-808.

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Schanzer DL, Langley JM, Tam TW. Hospitalization attributable to influenza and other viral respiratory illnesses in Canadian children. Pediatr Infect Dis J. 2006;25(0891-3668; 0891-3668; 9):795-800.

Schanzer DL, Sevenhuysen C, Winchester B, et al. Estimating influenza deaths in Canada, 1992- 2009. PLoS ONE. 2013;8(11).

### 6.0 Resources

- Island Health Intranet Home page [Flu Shots](#)

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