



# Vaccinate or mask policy continues in BC for flu season

November 19, 2015

With flu season around the corner, HSA members are reminded of the provincial influenza control policy in effect in BC.

In spite of changes in other provinces, the flu prevention policy in BC has not changed, and health care workers who choose not to be vaccinated have options available to them, including wearing a surgical mask.

Health care workers must report their vaccination status confidentially through an on-line form.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

The employer has sent out a notice that the flu policy is in effect. Can my employer make me get a flu shot?

The provincial health care worker Influenza Control Program Policy states that it is mandatory that employees either:

- (a) provide the employer with proof that they have had the annual flu shot; **OR**
- (b) wear a mask for the duration of the flu season when in patient care areas.

Click [here](#) to view the *Provincial Influenza Control Policy in its entirety*.

## **What if my doctor advises me not to get the flu shot?**

The Policy is clear that any employees who have not had the flu shot, or have not reported that they have had the flu shot, or have reported that they have declined to get the flu shot, must wear a mask for the duration of the flu season (typically December 1 through March 31).

However, if you are unable to get the flu shot for medical reasons, you should obtain a medical letter from your doctor explaining why you cannot have the vaccination. Provide the medical documentation to your employer's Workplace Health department. Options may include wearing a mask, or accommodation in a different work area if available.

## **What happens if I choose not to get a flu shot because I am personally opposed to it?**

The employer may require you to wear a mask for the duration of the flu season. In the event of an outbreak, the employer may attempt to reassign you to work in a different area if alternate work is available, but you may also be sent home with or without pay until the outbreak is declared over.

## **What if I can't wear a mask?**

You should approach your employer through the Workplace Health department to explain why you are unable to wear a mask, and request an accommodation. You may be required to provide information from your doctor if there is a medical reason which prevents you from wearing a mask.

## **My employer advises I have to report my flu vaccination status through an online self-reporting system. Is my information kept confidential?**

In 2014, a web-based central reporting process was introduced for the health authorities and Providence

Health Care, which provides employees with the ability to report their vaccination status online utilizing a secure and confidential web form. Each of these employers is responsible for providing their employees with the link or web address where they can access the web form.

Many employers provide on-site flu immunization clinics, however, if you choose to receive the flu shot from an external provider (such as your doctor or pharmacy), you must obtain a written record of immunization and keep it in a safe place in the event you are asked to provide proof of immunization.

Once you have received your flu shot, even if it is at a workplace clinic, you must access and complete the web form in order to report your vaccination status. Once you have submitted the form, you will receive an automated e-mail confirming receipt of your form.

New as of this year, if you have declined to receive the flu shot for the 2015-2016 flu season, you still must access and complete the web form to report your immunization status.

It is the managers' responsibility to ensure that the policy is adhered to by staff and therefore your employer will advise the manager which employees in their department have provided proof of vaccination and do not need to wear a mask, or which employees have not provided proof or have declined to receive the flu vaccination and therefore must wear a mask. However, this vaccination status report information is confidential and managers are not permitted to distribute it.

**I have been asked to indicate to my professional practice leader whether I intend to get a flu shot or not. Is it necessary to both complete the self-report form and also let my manager know if I have received the shot?**

If an employee reports their inoculation status to this confidential self-reporting centre, the manager/PPL will be advised by the employer which of their staff has received the flu shot, and which have not or have not reported. The manager/PPL does require this information so that they can take any steps necessary to enforce the employer's policy. If you do not want to advise your manager directly of your status, you can confirm with them whether you have or have not reported to the central system.

**I've heard there is a decision by an Ontario arbitrator that found that a similar flu policy there was unenforceable. Why is this flu policy still in place?**

We are aware of that decision and are reviewing it to determine whether there are any steps we can take to persuade the health authorities in BC to rescind their flu policies. However, the flu policy remains in force, and employees are required to comply for the 2015-2016 flu season.

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