Immunization Programs-RN Responsibilities

Quality Immunization Programs

Immunizations in Alberta can be provided through a variety of settings, including public health clinics, physician offices, health-care institutions, community settings, and private agencies. While most publicly funded immunization programs are run through public health agencies, some non-publicly funded immunization services may also be provided by private health-care agencies. The safety and quality of these services rest with the health professional providing the immunization program oversight and the nurse or other health professional who administers the vaccine.

Immunization Program Oversight

All Schedule I vaccines require a prescription from an authorized prescriber for a specific client before the vaccine can be administered or the immunization program oversight is provided by a health professional with the authority to dispense the flu vaccine (e.g., pharmacist). Schedule II vaccines need to be supported by their practice setting and need to be part of a quality immunization program.

Immunization is more than performing the psychomotor task of giving an injection, and involves additional knowledge, skill, and competence to properly administer. Safe immunization requires:

- knowledge, skill, and judgment to assess the appropriateness of administering the vaccine to an individual client;
- sharing with the client the risks and benefits of receiving versus not receiving the vaccine;
- careful client assessment for anaphylaxis risk, such as previous anaphylaxis and/or severe allergy to any component of the vaccine or to latex;
- compliance with the recommended dose, route, site, and schedule for administering the vaccine;
- vaccine handling and storage according to the vaccine manufacturers package insert and employer policy;
- knowledge of the vaccine action, interaction, minor side-effects, and potential adverse events;
- monitoring the client during and following vaccine administration; and
- managing side-effects or adverse effects of the vaccine.

Quality Components of Immunization Programs

Components of a high quality immunization program include program policies, practice standards, and vaccine management. These components are intended to guide:

- the development of a comprehensive immunization program in either the public or private sector in Alberta; and
- the practice of nurses who provide immunization services.
Strategies to address each component include:

Program policies
- All providers of immunizations should participate in local and provincial initiatives that evaluate immunization programs.
- Registered nurses who are responsible for an immunization program should maintain public after-hours access to professionals, or refer clients to 811, with the expertise to advise clients on unexpected reactions or adverse events post-immunization.

Practice standards
- Nurses who participate in an immunization program must have access to an information manual or practice standards that address topics such as the risks and benefits of receiving the vaccine, contraindications, procedures for anaphylaxis, volume of vaccine permitted in specific anatomical sites, appropriate dosage, procedure for multiple injections, informed consent, assessment when the vaccine schedule has been interrupted, safe disposal of sharps, and infection prevention practices.
- All nurses who immunize should be provided with orientation.
- Procedures must be in place for tracking, reporting, and managing immunization errors on an ongoing basis.
- Procedures on how to assess and report all vaccine-related adverse events must be in place, as per the Alberta Health Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) Policy.

Vaccine management
- Appropriate storage, handling, and transporting of vaccines must be ensured, as per the Alberta Health Alberta Vaccine Cold Chain (AVCC) Policy.
- There should be consultation with nurses participating in immunization programs to select and evaluate vaccine products to facilitate safe and efficient immunization in the field.
- Methods to effectively manage vaccine inventory and monitor vaccine expiry dates must be established.
- Vaccine utilization must be tracked on an ongoing basis.

Documentation
- Documentation procedures must be in accordance with the Canadian Immunization Guide (2014).
- Nurses should record the immunization in the personal immunization record of the client and in the health record.
- Immunization records should include the following:
  - brand name of the administered product,
  - time and date of administration,
  - quantity of administered dose (if applicable),
  - anatomical site of administration,
  - route of administration,
  - lot number of the product, and
  - name and professional designation of the person administering the product.
- Additional information to be added to the health-care record may include:
  - relevant serologic data (rubella or hepatitis B serology), and
  - contraindications to the vaccine or reasons for withholding immunization.
Education and Promotion
- Promotion of immunization through public education by all nurses, including those who provide immunizations.
- Teach nursing students about immunizations and encourage student participation in the practice setting.

Occupational Health and Safety
- Development of prevention plans to reduce sharps related injuries.
- Development of management plans for exposure to sharps and sharp related incidents.
- Document all management of staff post-exposure procedures regarding sharps related injuries.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has outlined core competencies needed by health-care professionals to administer immunizations in Canada.

For further information on RN responsibilities and accountability with immunization, see the Flu Immunization-RN Responsibilities.
