

Memorandum

Date: October 24, 2022
To: Red Deer Remand Staff
CC: Angela Draude, Corrections Health; Nicola Magigi, IPC; CDC Outbreak
From: Dr. Digby Horne, Medical Officer of Health, Central Zone
RE: Important Notice to Red Deer Remand Staff About Influenza Vaccine and Antivirals

Why is it important that individuals working in correctional environments be immunized with influenza vaccine every year?

Correctional centres are high-risk environments for influenza outbreaks. This is due to communal living arrangements and increased prevalence of respiratory illness (e.g. asthma), immunosuppression (e.g. HIV infection), and chronic medical conditions in the offender population. Influenza can lead to hospitalization and death in those with chronic disease, even if they have been immunized, due to a sub-optimal immune response.

The influenza vaccine has to be given every year because the strains change and protection is not long-lasting. Correctional workers may become infected with influenza at work and spread it to others, including offenders and family members. Studies show that 5-10% of adults and 20-30% of children are infected each year. Influenza can be spread even if a person has mild or no symptoms. The vaccine is estimated to provide about 60% protection; results vary by year depending on the relatedness of the circulating and vaccine strains. Even if you are not completely protected after immunization and become ill, the length and severity of illness as well as the amount of virus you might spread may be less. If you have any questions about the vaccine, please call Health Link Alberta at 811.

Where can I get influenza immunization?

Immunization is available at pharmacies and possibly some physician offices.

What happens during an influenza outbreak at a correctional centre if I do not get immunized?

In some cases, the Medical Officer of Health may recommend to the Centre Director that:

1. You are excluded from work at the outbreak site until the outbreak is over, usually 10-14 days.

OR

2. You can continue working if you start taking an antiviral medication, oseltamivir, prior to your first shift and continue until the outbreak is declared over. Oseltamivir requires a prescription from a doctor, nurse-practitioner, or a prescribing pharmacist (<https://pharmacists.ab.ca>).

Note for Justice and Solicitor General and contracted employees: It may be difficult to get a prescription quickly at the time of an outbreak. If you are not planning to be immunized, you can contact your prescriber now, before an outbreak happens, to get an antiviral prescription that can be filled at the time of the outbreak (anytime between October and April). If a visit to your prescriber is required, please bring this letter.

Thank you for helping to prevent influenza!

For more information, contact
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