Influenza Immunize or Mask Policy

A. Policy Statement

All individuals covered by this Policy must either choose to be vaccinated annually against influenza or wear a surgical/procedure mask during influenza season when in a Patient Care Location (as defined on page 3) in accordance with this Policy. During an influenza outbreak, this Policy is suspended at the outbreak location and the Five Hills Health Region’s outbreak policies will apply.

B. Background

Influenza can be a serious contagious disease spread by droplet transmission through close contact with an infected individual. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, nationally there are between 2,000 and 8,000 deaths per year from influenza and its complications. Infected individuals are highly contagious and can transmit influenza starting 24 hours before they are symptomatic and continuing for several days.

Among vaccine-preventable diseases, influenza causes by far the most deaths, outpacing all other vaccine preventable diseases combined. Hospitalized patients and residents of long-term care facilities 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 who choose to receive an influenza vaccination annually to protect themselves and their patients can be the most effective and powerful example of responsible practices in a healthcare setting, and a highly credible influence on patient safety.
Healthcare workers have been implicated as a source of influenza in healthcare settings. Vaccination of healthcare workers will reduce their risk of getting influenza and spreading influenza to the patients, residents and clients to whom they provide care. The most effective strategy to prevent influenza is annual vaccination. Influenza vaccine is very safe and effective.

The wearing of masks can serve as a method of source control to protect patients, residents, and clients from infected healthcare workers who may have few or no symptoms. Masks may also protect unvaccinated healthcare workers from infected patients or visitors with influenza that has not yet been recognized.

Other infection control measures such as the rapid identification of ill patients, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, staying home when you are ill, etc. all help but vaccination remains the cornerstone of patient safety efforts to control influenza transmission.

C. Scope

This policy applies to all Five Hills Health Region employees (unionized and non-unionized/OOS), other privileged/credentialed professionals, residents, volunteers, students, contractors, and vendors (collectively, these individuals are referred to as “covered individuals”) who attend a Patient Care Location.

This policy also applies to any other persons who attend a Patient Care Location (these individuals are referred to as “Visitors”).

D. Responsibilities

1. All Covered Individuals must annually advise Five Hills Health Region of their influenza immunization status in a manner acceptable to Five Hills Health Region by the Vaccination Required Date or wear a mask.
2. During the annual Vaccination Required Period, Covered Individuals and Visitors who are not vaccinated against influenza are required to wear a surgical/procedural mask provided by Five Hills Health Region while at a Patient Care Location. Individuals required to wear a surgical/procedural mask will be responsible for maintaining their mask in good condition in accordance with Five Hills Health Region protocols. During an influenza outbreak in an Five Hills Health Region facility, this policy is suspended at the outbreak location and the Five Hills Health Region’s outbreak policies will apply.

3. Covered Individuals should continue to use personal protective equipment and abide by the Five Hills Health Region’s infection control practices to prevent the transmission of communicable diseases, including influenza.

4. Covered Individuals who experience influenza like illness/respiratory infection should follow Five Hills Health Region’s established reporting protocols.

5. 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.

6. Five Hills Health Region will inform Visitors of the requirements of this Policy and will make surgical/procedure masks available to Visitors.

E. Definitions

Vaccination Required Date

The date established annually by the Chief Medical Health Officer after which all persons covered under this policy are required to be vaccinated against influenza or wear a mask in accordance with this Policy. The Vaccination Required Date will be based on the analysis of annual influenza epidemiology. Typically this is from late November to late March but depends on the actual circulation of the influenza virus each year.
Vaccination Required Period

A period of time determined by the Chief Medical Health Officer and starting on the Vaccination Required Date. The Vaccination Required Period will usually be from late November to late March but depends on the actual circulation of the influenza virus each year (which may vary). During the Vaccination Required Period, Covered Individuals will be required to be vaccinated against influenza or wear a surgical/procedure mask in accordance with this Policy.

Patient Care Location

Patient Care Location includes:

a. any building, property, or site owned, leased, rented, or operated by Five Hills Health Region where there are patients, residents, or clients who are receiving health care; and

b. any patient/client/resident home or other location where Covered Individuals interact with and/or provide health care to the patient/client/resident in the course of his/her work for Five Hills Health Region;

but does not include any location designated by Five Hills Health Region to be excluded from the definition of Patient Care Location.

F. Compliance/Non-Compliance

During the 2014-15 Vaccination Required Period it is expected that staff will comply with this policy. Performance management measures will be used to address non-compliance with the policy.

Beyond complying with the policy, healthcare workers are encouraged to be an example to others and support immunization or wearing of masks by others in patient care areas during influenza transmission season.