

Position Statement 2013

Protecting Our Patients by Reducing the Impact of Seasonal Influenza

Health care leaders in Saskatchewan are committed to improving patient safety and employee health by reducing the impact of seasonal influenza. Saskatchewan requires a new approach to the prevention of influenza that will increase patient safety as well as increase the protection of health care workers and their families.

Every year patients in our hospitals and residents of our long-term care facilities experience serious complications related to influenza. In 2012/13 there were 51 influenza outbreaks in Saskatchewan healthcare facilities, causing illness for hundreds of patients and residents. Research shows that every year over 20% of health care providers (including physicians) become infected with influenza.

The influenza virus spreads very easily from person to person through the tiny droplets that are produced with coughing or sneezing. It can also spread when a person touches these tiny virus-containing droplets and then touches their eyes, mouth, or nose before washing their hands. The **most effective** way to prevent the transmission of influenza is annual influenza immunization. Transmission of the virus can also be limited through infection prevention methods such as masks, frequent hand-washing, coughing and sneezing into the sleeve, cleaning surfaces often, and staying at home when sick.

Last year, only 50% of Saskatchewan healthcare workers and professionals were immunized against influenza. To promote the health and safety of our patients and our workforce we are strongly encouraging all healthcare workers, health professionals, physicians, and volunteers to put our patients first and receive the influenza shot every year. We expect non-immunized healthcare workers, including physicians, to choose to wear a procedure mask at all times while they are in patient care areas during the entire influenza season to ensure that our patients and staff are protected.

Other provinces have implemented policies requiring staff and physicians to either be immunized or wear a mask during influenza season. An arbitrator in British Columbia recently upheld such a policy in that province. Saskatchewan is not planning to implement a similar policy this year; however, we are considering moving in that direction in future influenza seasons.

Together we can commit to putting our Patients First. We recommend and expect that healthcare workers in all occupations will make every effort to get their annual flu shot or wear a mask in patient care areas during the entire influenza season. Patient and worker safety is of utmost importance to all of us.



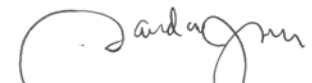
Hon. Dustin Duncan
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On behalf of all
Health Region and
Cancer Agency CEOs