



Dear Colleagues,

As you know, the 2020/2021 influenza season is about to begin. Every year, influenza is a serious concern in British Columbia, causing significant morbidity and mortality; and this year more than ever with COVID-19 surging we need to do all we can to prevent influenza from circulating too. We know hospitalized patients and seniors in residential care are more vulnerable than healthy adults to severe illness or complications from influenza as well as from COVID-19. While we have very little influenza circulating in BC currently, we need to be prepared as we move into the peak of influenza season.

In order to better protect healthcare workers and the patients and residents we care for, each health authority and Providence Health Care enacted the Influenza Control Program Policy, starting in 2012, which required health care workers, physicians and visitors to choose either the influenza vaccine or to wear a mask in patient care areas during influenza season. It also required staff and physicians to report their immunization status. The program has been very effective in raising awareness of the measures we must all take to prevent influenza and most importantly leading to a significant rise in vaccination rates across the province.

This year our amended Influenza Control Program Policy will be in effect, and it stipulates that health care staff and physicians will be expected to either be immunized against influenza or wear a mask as appropriate in patient care areas. However, no longer will unvaccinated employees or physicians face discipline for failing to wear masks at all times in patient care areas. This influenza policy complements requirements established for the management of the COVID-19 pandemic and will contribute to reducing the risk of all communicable respiratory infections. Reporting of your influenza immunization status remains mandatory.

Influenza immunization remains the most important and effective measure to prevent influenza and to protect healthcare workers, their families and the patients and residents we care for and it is more important than ever in this pandemic year. For those who choose not to be immunized or who cannot receive the influenza vaccine, appropriate use of masks can also provide protection for healthcare workers and patients from influenza and from COVID-19 and remains an important part of the amended policy. In the past six years of the Influenza Control Program Policy, vaccine uptake rates have risen and remained at high levels and this year we need to ensure that trend will continue. I believe this collaborative approach and amended policy will support all healthcare workers and physicians to do their best to protect themselves and the vulnerable people we care for from influenza.

This year, influenza season for the purposes of the amended policy will start on December 1, 2020.

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Thank you for your ongoing commitment to providing safe care to our patients, residents and clients.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bonnie Henry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bonnie" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Henry".

Bonnie Henry
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer