

Administering Vaccines



You asked a Practice Advisor: A private agency wants to hire me to administer influenza vaccines. As a registered nurse, is it within my scope of practice to do this? What do I need to consider?

By Virgil Guitard

Competencies required for administering influenza vaccine are the same as for the administration of other medication. Registered nurses (RNs) are responsible for their own competence and are accountable for their own actions at all times.

When administering immunizing agents, whether in the context of an immunization program or in individual administration, the RN must ensure the following four conditions are met:

- 1) an informed consent has been obtained;
- 2) an individualized medical order/medical directive is in place for the vaccine and for the drugs required for managing any possible side effects;
- 3) the RN is competent to deliver and manage the vaccine and any possible side effects; and
- 4) the administration will be documented.

The nurse proposing the treatment is responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensuring consent is obtained.

NANB Consultation Services

Did you know that NANB offers individual, one-on-one, consultation services?

This confidential service is offered to support New Brunswick nurses and to encourage safe, ethical, and competent practice.

Consultation is offered on a wide variety of issues such as the interpretation of Association documents and government legislation, scope of practice issues, ethical behaviours and standards, issues of safety and appropriate action, conflict resolution, and the management of procedural and practice issues.

If you would like to access NANB Consultation Services, please contact Virgil Guitard, Nursing Practice Advisor, tel.: (506) 783-8745, toll free 1 800 442-4417 or E-mail: vguitard@nanb.nb.ca.

Have you recently moved?

If so, be sure to contact the Association and let us know. It's easy. Call toll free at 1 800 442-4417 or send us an E-mail: nanb@nanb.nb.ca.

Attn: Registration Services—Change of address

Nurses Association of New Brunswick
165 Regent Street
Fredericton, NB E3B 7B4

Toll free 1 800 442-4417
Tel.: (506) 458-8731
E-mail: nanb@nanb.nb.ca

Be sure to include your name, old and current address, and your registration number.

1) Informed Consent

The NANB *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses (2005)* and the *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses (2008)*, require that nursing care is provided with the person's informed consent.

Consent must relate to the treatment being proposed, be informed, be voluntary and not have been obtained through misrepresentation or fraud.

An informed consent means the client must be provided with the information necessary to make a decision to consent, or to refuse the vaccine. This information must include:

- the nature of the treatment;
- the expected benefits of the treatment;
- the material risks and side effects of the treatment;
- alternative courses of action; and
- the likely consequences of not having the treatment.

The nurse proposing the treatment is responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensuring consent is obtained. If the client is incapable of giving consent, the substitute decision-maker must provide consent.

Consent may be written or verbal. Documentation that the consent was obtained should be completed by using a consent form or by documentation in the health record.

2) Prescription and Medical Directives

A prescription by a physician or nurse practitioner is needed before a vaccine can be administered. This can take the form of a client-specific order, which is a prescription for an individual client, or as a medical directive. A medical directive is an order applicable to a range of clients who meet certain conditions.

The medical directive must include:

- the specific medication (in this case both the vaccine and treatment for an anaphylactic reaction);
- specific condition(s) that must be met; and
- any specific circumstance(s) that must exist before the directive can be implemented.

Nurses are accountable for the administration and outcome of all care they provide including providing vaccines in any setting.

The medical directive must have the name and signature of the physician authorizing the directive, and the date and signature of any administrative authority that is approving the directive.

3) Accountability

The NANB *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses (2005)* state that nurses are accountable for the administration and outcome of all care they provide including providing vaccines in any setting. The following factors must be considered when deciding the appropriateness of administering the vaccine.

- 1) Do you have the knowledge, skill, and judgement required to assess the appropriateness of the vaccine? Nurses need to understand the:
 - indications and contraindications; and
 - risks involved and expected outcomes of vaccination.
- 2) Do you have the knowledge, skill, and judgement required to take appropriate actions before, during and after the administration of the vaccine?
- 3) Do you have the knowledge, skill, and judgement required to assess for negative outcomes?
- 4) Do you have the resources to intervene, if required? For example, in the case of anaphylactic reaction, having an anaphylaxis kit available (including epinephrine or adrenaline and the appropriate prescription or directive) and being able to manage this outcome or having someone readily available who is (e.g. respiratory support).

4) Documentation

Documentation is integral to safe and effective nursing practice in all settings including the administration of immunizations. The *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses (2005)* indicate that nurses are required to record and maintain timely and accurate documentation in accordance with agency policy and accepted professional standards. The principles of documentation as outlined in *Documenting Care: Standards for Registered Nurses (2002)* apply to the administration of a vaccine.

For more information regarding medication administration, you can call or e-mail NANB and speak with a practice advisor at 1 800 442-4417/1-506-458-8731 or at nanb@nanb.nb.ca □

Editor's note: NANB gratefully acknowledges permission granted from the College of Nurses of Ontario to adapt/adopt their 2005 Practice Guideline *Influenza Vaccinations*.