

# The Role of the RN/NP – Immunization

## Questions & Answers

Registered nurses (RNs) and Nurse Practitioners (NPs) play a key role in the administration of vaccines through immunization. Vaccines have a significant positive impact on the health of the population by controlling the spread of vaccine-preventable disease (PHAC, 2015). The safe, effective and ethical administration of immunizations requires specific competencies. This Q & A will address common questions and introduce some considerations for nurses to be aware of prior to providing immunizations.

### Q1. What are the responsibilities of an RN regarding the administration of immunizations?

**A.** In the administration of immunizations, RNs must:

- a) possess the required competencies
- b) be able to differentiate between personal beliefs around immunization and actual scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness
- c) have a prescription or a care directive to administer the vaccine
- d) ensure that the administration of immunizations is within their scope of employment and their agency has the related policies
- e) take steps to ensure client safety by having a plan in place to manage potential adverse events, (such as anaphylaxis) following immunization. This includes medication management, client monitoring and documentation. Documentation following immunization needs to include the lot number of the vaccine in case of a recall or adverse event. Adverse events must be reported to Public Health. A separate prescription or care directive is required to administer a medication for an adverse/allergic event.
- f) report all cold chain breaks to the local Public Health office. Keep vaccine refrigerated while waiting to receive direction from Public Health on use of affected vaccines

### Q2. What are the NP responsibilities related to administration of immunizations?

**A.** In addition to the responsibilities listed for RNs, NPs have the authority to prescribe vaccines. NPs must ensure they have the required knowledge and skills to prescribe and administer vaccines.

### Q3. How is immunization different than the administration of other medication?

**A.** Administering immunizations requires additional competencies beyond routine medications. There are different requirements for vaccine administration such as those indicated in e) and f) above.

### Q4. How can I ensure I have the required competencies to safely administer immunizations?

**A.** The competencies required to safely administer immunizations are outlined in The Canadian Immunization Guide (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2015), found at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/professionals-professionnels-eng.php>. In addition, you will need to ensure you meet the competency requirements of your employer.

## Q5. What role can care directives play in the administration of immunizations?

**A.** A care directive is an order written by an authorized prescriber (e.g., nurse practitioner, physician, and pharmacist) for an intervention or series of interventions to be implemented by another care provider (e.g., registered nurse) for a range of clients with identified health conditions, only when specific circumstances exist. A care directive must be approved by an agency's Medical Advisory Committee or equivalent approval body. For more information on care directives please refer to [Care Directives, Guidelines for Registered Nurses](#), (CRNNS, 2012).

A care directive can be used to authorize an RN employed with a specific agency to administer an identified immunization to a specific client population (school aged children, nursing home clients) and/or to administer a medication for an adverse/allergic reaction following an immunization. Some care directives are only valid for specified periods of time, such as during influenza season. Without a care directive, registered nurses are working outside of their scope of practice and therefore do not have liability coverage for the administration of immunization.

## Q6. Are there any specific considerations for nurses who are self-employed?

**A.** Beyond meeting the responsibilities of an RN/NP regarding the administration of immunizations outlined in question one and two, you also need to ensure you have adequate liability protection. To determine if you have sufficient liability protection, contact the Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS) at 1-800-267-3390. For more information on self-employment, refer to [A Guide for Self-Employed Registered Nurses](#) (CRNNS, 2014).

## Q7. Can student nurses administer immunizations?

**A.** Depending on their nursing program's policies and policies, they may administer immunizations, as part of their core curriculum, under the direct supervision of assigned clinical instructors/preceptors.

## References

CRNNS (2017), *Medication guidelines for Registered Nurses*. Halifax: Author.

CRNNS (2012), *Care directives, guidelines for registered nurses*. Halifax: Author.

Public Health Agency of Canada, (2015), *Canadian immunization guide*, 8th ed.). Retrieved from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/professionals-professionnels-eng.php>