

## Policy 2.4 - Competencies for Immunization Providers

**Purpose:** The purpose of this policy is to provide standards to regional health authorities on the immunization competencies required by health professionals who administer vaccines provided through the New Brunswick Immunization Program.

**Preamble:** Immunization has become increasingly complex and requires a specialized body of knowledge and technical skills. The Public Health Agency of Canada, in conjunction with the Professional Education Working Group, (a group representing immunization program planners, health profession educators, licensing bodies and professional societies, health education accreditors, vaccine regulators and vaccine manufacturers in Canada) has developed a guidance document on the competencies required for safe and competent immunization practice. *Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals* identifies essential universal topics for effective immunization and should be used by educators, program coordinators and planners, and front-line health professionals to develop immunization learning programs.

Competency in immunization practice leads to higher vaccine coverage rates, which in turn will maintain the highest possible degree of community protection against vaccine preventable diseases. Competency in immunization practice is an individual professional responsibility and the responsibility of the employing agency. It is guided by professional practice standards, employer/organizational policies and evidence-based research.

**Although this policy applies to all those noted below, it is strongly recommended that all health professionals who provide services undertake specific immunization training and maintain their competencies as outlined in the Public Health Agency of Canada *Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals*, dated November 2008.**

**Policy:** Health professionals within the regional health authority who provide publicly funded vaccine and biologics through the New Brunswick Immunization Program must demonstrate competency in the skills and knowledge required for safe and competent practice through completion of learning programs based on the *Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals*.

For the purposes of this policy, the term “health professionals” refers to:

1. Those employed by the regional health authorities and who administer vaccine. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - Public Health staff who administer vaccines;
  - acute and long-term care staff who administer vaccines;
  - community health centre staff who administer vaccines; and
  - paramedics, nurses and/or other medical staff employed by regional health authorities to assist in administration of vaccine during a pandemic immunization program.

This policy also applies to student health professionals who administer vaccines during their clinical practicum within the regional health authorities.

2. Those employed by First Nations health programs and who are providing immunization under a medical directive provided by the regional medical officer of health.

## Standards:

1. Regional Health Authority (RHA) and First Nations staff providing publicly funded vaccine will:
  - have recognized training in immunization practices;
  - maintain their competencies in all areas of immunization.
2. Regional Health Authorities will designate a competent staff member (Public Health immunization coordinator and/or hospital staff immunization coordinator may provide a partnership of expertise) who has the training and competencies as above as well as demonstrate the technical and behavioural competencies required to oversee and co-ordinate activities to ensure ongoing competency of RHA and First Nations immunizing nurses.
3. Regional Health Authorities and First Nations will require that all health professionals complete a knowledge and skills-based learning program prior to administering vaccine. While it is recognized that many health professionals have administered vaccine without completing a formal competency process, ongoing competency must be assessed and maintained.
4. Regional Health Authorities and First Nations will have a mechanism in place to review and assess staff competencies at regular intervals. Public Health Nurses, refer to Appendix 4.2 *Competency Requirements for Public Health Immunization Nurses*. **First Nations will follow Appendix 4.2 or provide an alternate process for assessing staff competencies acceptable to the Medical Officer of Health (MOH).**
5. Immunization learning programs developed by the regional health authorities must adhere to policies and standards of the New Brunswick Immunization Program. Learning programs are to be based on the [Immunization Competencies for Health Professionals](#).
6. For those who administer vaccine under the medical directive of the Regional Medical Officer of Health, learning programs must be recognized as acceptable by the Regional Medical Officer of Health.
7. The following learning modules and protocols related to ongoing maintenance and competency are recognized as acceptable for use by immunization providers:
  - EPIC program <https://www.cps.ca/en/epic-pfci>
  - British Columbia Centre for Disease Control online immunization course <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/education-development/immunization-courses/immunization-competency-course>
8. Regional Health Authorities and First Nations will have a policy in place to identify and manage errors and near misses. Public Health Nurses, refer to Appendix 4.2.2 *Reporting of Errors and Near Miss Requirements for Public Health Nurses*. First Nations will follow Appendix 4.2.2 or provide an acceptable process to the Medical Officer of Health.
9. Guidance for mass immunization or special immunization circumstances will be determined as needed.
10. It is an expectation that the Regional Health Authorities and First Nations Community Health's policies in regards to the above mentioned topics will be shared with the MOH. As the medical authority signing the directive, he/she must be satisfied with the content and details of these policies.