



Pharmaceutical Services Branch guidance note

Prescribing and administration of vaccines in WA

Who should read this information?

This information is for patients receiving immunisations and medical practitioners, pharmacists and nurses prescribing, supplying or administering vaccines.

Vaccines

Vaccines, such as the influenza vaccine, are prescription only medicines. They are regulated by the *Poisons Act 1964* and *Poisons Regulations 1965*.

To prevent spread of the flu and other infections, it is important to ensure as much of the community as possible is vaccinated. For this reason some special rules have been put in place, which mean a prescription is not always required to obtain a vaccine.

Vaccines are generally safe but can cause adverse effects and do require appropriate health professional oversight. Persons supplying or administering vaccines have a responsibility to adhere to standards and ensure safe patient treatment.

Supply of vaccines

The legislation allows for several methods of vaccine supply in Western Australia.

Doctors and nurse practitioners

A doctor or nurse practitioner (within clinical practice guidelines) can write a prescription to be dispensed at a pharmacy.

A doctor or nurse practitioner may also keep vaccines at their practice and supply or administer these to a patient.

Practice nurses

A doctor or nurse practitioner can authorise administration by a nurse at that place of practice, such as a practice nurse working in a medical surgery.

Supply must be authorised in writing for each individual patient. A Medical Practitioner Vaccine Administration Order (MPVAO), valid for 12 months, can be used. An example of a MPVAO template is available at:

www.public.health.wa.gov.au/3/1054/2/medical_practitioner_vaccine_administration_orders.pm

A nurse in the public health system

A registered nurse working for:

- the Department of Health
 - a public hospital
 - Local Government
- or
- an Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA) health service

can administer vaccines without a medical prescription as part of a vaccine program.

These nurses must have further training and adhere to a code of practice. See: www.public.health.wa.gov.au/cproot/3555/2/vaccine-administraton-code-june-2012.pdf

Other nurses

A doctor or nurse practitioner may authorise a registered nurse to provide immunisations at another site, such as at a workplace or in a pharmacy.

This requires a poisons permit issued by the Department of Health. It requires a person to be responsible for the storage and care of the vaccines.

Supply must be authorised in writing for each individual patient. Guidelines governing the authorisation and supply process must be in place.

Other persons

Apart from those described above, there is no mechanism for other persons to supply vaccines in Western Australia. Those doing so may be breaking the law. Vaccine supply laws may differ between states and territories.

Immunisation in pharmacies

At present, pharmacists may not supply vaccines without a prescription.

Pharmacists are generally not qualified to administer vaccines.

However, a pharmacy can host (provide the premises) for an authorised person to run a vaccine program. Usually this is a mobile vaccine service, where a poisons permit holder uses a doctor to authorise a registered nurse to administer the vaccine.

Pharmacies involved in hosting a vaccine service should adhere to guidelines issued by the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. See www.psa.org.au/archives/21565

Immunisation in the workplace

There are now many mobile immunisation services which can come to the workplace to administer vaccines. These businesses must have a poisons permit. More information on obtaining poisons permits is available at www.health.wa.gov.au/poisons

The Department of Health requires that the immunisation provider ensure:

- responsible purchase, storage and supply of the vaccines

- correct record keeping
- procedures for safe patient assessment, vaccine administration and provision of after care
- each administration is authorised by a doctor or nurse practitioner
- adverse effects are reported
- nursing staff have completed an immunisation course.

Cold Chain

Vaccines must be stored at the correct temperature at each stage of storage and supply (termed cold chain) to ensure they do not lose effectiveness.

All immunisation providers should meet 'Strive for 5' vaccine storage guidelines. See:

www.public.health.wa.gov.au/3/471/2/cold_chain__immunisation.pm

Record keeping

Legislation requires the administration or supply of a prescription medicine to be recorded in a patient's medical notes, regardless of the practitioner supplying or the legal mechanism used. The practitioner must record the:

- medicine name, strength and quantity
- date of administration or supply.

These records must be kept for two years.

More information

For more information on the prescribing and administration of medicines, obtaining poisons permits or matters relating to poisons legislation in Western Australia, please contact the Pharmaceutical Services Branch on 9222 6883 (Monday to Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm) or poisons@health.wa.gov.au