



*The Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by its registrants. The term nurse in this document refers to LPNs, NPs, and RNs unless otherwise stated.*

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Our practice support tools are developed using current reference material. The source of this material is available upon request.



## Overview

Nurses play a key role in the administration of immunization (which includes vaccines). Immunizations have a significant and positive impact on the health of the population by controlling the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases. All nurses are expected to use peer reviewed scientific evidence when educating clients or the public about immunizations. Additionally, they are accountable to differentiate between personal beliefs around immunization and the actual scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness.

This tool is a resource for nurses to help them understand their accountabilities in the administration of immunizations including:

- Competencies and education
- Authorizing mechanisms
- Managing adverse events

Like all regulatory tools, use this document in conjunction with the standards of practice and code of ethics for LPNs, RNs and NPs.

## Competencies and Education

The safe, effective and ethical administration of immunization by nurses requires specific competencies.

All nurses are:

- Accountable to possess the required knowledge, skill and judgement to safely administer immunizations
  - Administering immunizations requires additional competencies beyond routine medications. There are different requirements for vaccine administration such as adverse event and cold chain management.
  - The competencies required to safely administer Immunizations are outlined in the [Canadian Immunization Guide – PHAC](#)
- Encouraged to acquire immunization education to support their practice and ensure interventions related to immunization are safe.
  - Education can be obtained through a private trainer, facility or through the employer.

In addition LPNs:

- should consult, collaborate or refer clients to an appropriate care provider before administering immunizations for clients with an increased risk of negative outcome (e.g. client with history of reaction to immunizations).

## Authorizing Mechanisms

An authorizing mechanism is any organizationally approved process that enables a nurse to implement a prescribed intervention. It is important to note:

- RNs and LPNs must have an authorizing mechanism such as a direct order, prescription or care directive from an authorized prescriber to administer a vaccine.
- A care directive can be used to authorize RNs and LPNs to administer immunizations to a specific population (i.e. school-aged children, nursing home clients) and/or to administer a medication for an adverse event or following an immunization.
- RNs and LPNs must ensure that the administration of immunizations is within their scope of employment and their employer has the related policies to support this practice.

- NPs have the authority to prescribe immunizations and must ensure they have the required knowledge, skills and judgement to do so.

## Managing Adverse Events

Nurses must take steps to ensure client safety by having a plan in place to manage potential adverse events following immunization (e.g. anaphylaxis). The plan needs to include medication management, client monitoring and documentation.

## Student Nurses

Student nurses are not regulated by NSCN and do not work under the license of a nurse. They are accountable to the nursing program and are required to adhere to the policies and practices of that program. Please refer any questions regarding student nurses administering immunizations to the academic institution.

## Considerations for Self-Employed Nurses

In addition to the accountabilities outlined, self-employed nurses need to ensure they have adequate liability protection. To determine if you have sufficient liability, nurses must contact:

- RNs and NPs – Canadian Nurses Protective Society
- LPNs – Lloyd Sadd Insurance Brokers Ltd

## Key Points to Remember

- Nurses require additional competencies to administer vaccines beyond routine medications.
- Nurses are accountable to possess the required knowledge, skill and judgement to safely administer immunizations this can be achieved by completing post graduate or employer education or on the job mentorship
- Authorizing mechanism such as an order, prescription or care directive from an authorized prescriber is required to administer a vaccine.
- Nurses must ensure client safety by having a plan in place to manage potential adverse events following immunization.
- Nurses are accountable to differentiate between personal beliefs around immunization and actual scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness.

## Recommended Readings

- [NSCN Guideline - Self-Employed Nurses](#)
- [NSCN Guideline - Care Directives](#)
- [NSCN Guideline - Documentation](#)
- [NSCN Guideline - Medications](#)

For further information on anything contained within this practice guideline, please contact a NSCN Practice Consultant at [practice@nscn.ca](mailto:practice@nscn.ca).