

## Cold Chain and Taking Care of Vaccine – For Offices

### What is Cold Chain?

Cold chain is the process of storing vaccines properly between +2°C and +8°C during delivery, handling, and storage in refrigerators. If the temperature goes outside of the range, the vaccine may not be usable, as the effectiveness can decrease. The vaccine may not look like it had an exposure outside of the required temperature range, but the person who receives it may not get proper protection.

### How is this monitored?

The Province of Ontario mandates this program. Health care providers order vaccine from their local health unit. Public health staff check locations where vaccine is stored to ensure that the protocols are followed. Inspections happen at least once yearly in all locations (doctor's offices, walk-in clinics, hospitals, long-term care homes and pharmacies).

### Ordering vaccine from the Middlesex-London Health Unit

Health care providers that have “passed” (ie. met necessary requirements) their cold chain inspection may order vaccine from the health unit. Offices that are unable to meet the requirements will not be approved to order or receive vaccine.

#### Ordering:

- Fax your order to 519-663-9581 (phone orders are not accepted)
- Two weeks of temperature logs must also be faxed
- Allow 72 hours (3 business days) for the order to be filled
- Order minimally to help reduce wastage
- Your order will be ready for pick up at the Middlesex London Health Unit London office at 50 King St. London only (please note we do not deliver or send vaccine)
- To pick up vaccine you will need:
  - a hard-sided insulated cooler with ice packs and a working digital max-min thermometer to ensure the temperature is maintained between +2°C to +8°C
  - bubble wrap or a towel available to separate the ice from the vaccine

#### Returning:

- Vaccine should be returned to the health unit if:
  - If it is expired or was exposed to temperatures outside of the required +2°C and +8°C
- Please complete the vaccine return form
- Place all vaccine and the vaccine return form in to a bag, label the bag with the health care provider / office name
- Write “vaccines - do not use” on the bag

The bag can be dropped off to 50 King St. London. It does not need to be in a cooler as it cannot be reused. You can work to prevent the need for returning vaccine by ordering minimally and taking care of your vaccine properly (vaccine wastage is very expensive).

### What is a cold chain incident?

An “incident” or “failure” is when the fridge temperature where the vaccine is being stored goes below +2°C or above +8°C. When this happens, the health care provider needs to call the health unit for direction. Public health unit staff will assess the situation and let you know which vaccines can still be used.

### How do I report a cold chain incident?

- Call the health unit right away at 519-663-5317 ext.2330
- Write down all of the vaccine involved in the incident – lot #'s, expiry dates, name of vaccines and number of doses. Note if any multi-dose vials have already been opened.
- Be prepared to fax in your fridge temperature logs
- Place all of the vaccine involved in the incident into a bag labeled “do not use until assessed”, keep the bag inside of a monitored refrigerator that is at the right temperature
- Do not use any of the vaccine until the incident is assessed
- If anyone was immunized with this vaccine during the cold chain incident, keep track of their information in case follow-up is required
- New vaccine cannot be ordered until the refrigerator is maintaining the proper temperature range again, or the problem is resolved, and temperature logs are stable for 5 days

Each office should have a designated person that is responsible for the vaccine. They can ensure that the temperature is monitored twice daily and recorded, be in charge of ordering, and follow protocols if there is an issue with maintaining the cold chain. Make sure that everyone in the office is aware of recommended vaccine handling and storage procedures so they can back up the designated person.

**See other fact sheets:**

#### Troubleshooting for Temperatures Outside of the Range

#### Refrigerators, Thermometers and Vaccine Handling

References:

Public Health Agency of Canada vaccine handling guidelines:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/2007/nvshglp-ldemv/index-eng.php>

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care vaccine handling guidelines:

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph\\_standards/docs/guidance/guide\\_vaccine\\_storage.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/guidance/guide_vaccine_storage.pdf)