3.9: Vaccine Storage and Handling

Vaccines must be carefully stored and handled from the time of manufacturing to administration. Health professionals need to be cognizant of the harmful impact that excessive heat and cold can have on vaccines, rendering them ineffective or destroyed. Errors in storage or handling also contribute to vaccine wastage. Consult the product monograph or local public health authority for information on proper storage conditions for each vaccine, including temperature. As a health professional, it is important to review the policies and procedures developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) (2015) and your provincial/territorial Ministry of Health and Local Public Health organization.

PHAC (2015) outlines a set of procedures to follow when handling and storing vaccines. These procedures include but are not limited to:

- Each office/location should have an identified staff member who is the primary vaccine coordinator and another member as a backup. Both should be fully trained in vaccine storage and handling protocols.
- Always refer to the vaccine product monograph for the most current information about storage information.
- Refrigerators and freezers, used for vaccine storage, must be dedicated to the storage of vaccines only. They should be placed in an area that is not accessible to the public.
- Refrigerators and freezer units must have a calibrated temperature monitoring device that provides continuous recording or minimum/maximum temperatures that are properly monitored, i.e. checked and documented twice a day.
- The majority of vaccines should be stored in a refrigerator at temperatures of +2 to +8 degrees Celsius. Some vaccines must be kept in a freezer at temperatures of -15 degrees Celsius or lower. Doors of units should be kept closed and opened a limited number of times.
- Units should have a sign that says: “Do not adjust refrigerator or freezer temperature controls. Notify primary vaccine coordinator or the backup/delegate coordinator if adjustments are necessary.”
- Vaccines should be placed in labelled, mesh baskets and stored in the middle of the unit rather than in doors or
drawers. Stock should be rotated so that vaccines with approaching expiry dates are positioned at the front and used first.

- Vaccines are stored in their original packaging.
- Some vaccines are **light sensitive** and health professionals should refer to the product information of each vaccine to determine restrictions.

Each site must have a contingency plan in place for vaccine storage in the event of electricity disruptions or unit malfunctions. If procedures have not been adhered to, and/or the temperature decreases in the required unit, notify the primary vaccine coordinator at your site and the local public health unit.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/immunizations/?p=127