



## Health workers and workplace influenza policy

Union Stewards can encourage members to be vaccinated, but you should also be prepared to support health care workers who aren't vaccinated in the event of an outbreak at their worksite.

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By Mary Kehoe  
Senior MSO Adviser

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Influenza or “the flu” is a highly contagious viral infection of the airways. It is referred to as “seasonal” influenza because these viruses circulate annually in the winter season in the northern hemisphere.

The timing and length of an influenza season varies from year to year. Outbreaks can happen as early as October, but most often activity peaks in January or later. Outbreaks occurring in April and even May are also not uncommon.

Those infected with influenza can spread the disease to others before they experience signs or symptoms of the illness themselves. Some can be infected but experience no symptoms and still spread the virus to others. This is important to recognize, especially by those in caretaking positions, such as parents and health care workers.

AUPE encourages all members to get an influenza vaccination if they can safely do so, but making flu shots mandatory for workers is a serious intrusion on their freedoms and personal autonomy. Although employers cannot force workers to receive vaccinations, a Labour Board decision in an AUPE/Carewest case in 2000 did uphold employers' rights to implement certain policies in the event of an influenza outbreak.

Health care facilities will implement outbreak control and infections policies when an influenza outbreak is reported. The Medical Officer of Health will determine if an outbreak has occurred and will issue the following directives for non-immunized workers.

Workers who have not already been vaccinated can opt to receive the influenza vaccine immediately and begin an oral antiviral medication, typically one called Tamiflu, and continue to take the oral medication for two weeks, or until the outbreak is declared over by the Medical Officer of Health. After receiving the influenza vaccination, it takes two weeks

to develop the required immunity. Workers can continue to work during the outbreak in these circumstances.

A non-immunized worker may also choose to begin the Tamiflu medication and not receive the influenza vaccine. They must, however, continue to take the medication for the duration of the outbreak in order to be allowed to continue working throughout its duration. If there should be a later outbreak, the worker would once again be required to begin the oral medication and continue it for the duration of the outbreak, as the individual would not have developed immunity to the virus.

If the worker chooses neither of these options, the employer will exclude them from working in the affected unit or facility and redeploy them to uninfected areas if possible. If this is not possible, they will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence or, in some cases, be allowed to access vacation time for the duration of the outbreak.

Union Stewards can play an important role in helping their members to understand workplace influenza prevention policy. You

can help encourage your members to be vaccinated, but also work with those who choose not to be vaccinated to minimize potential problems and understand their rights in the event of an outbreak. ■

### Flu Facts

**Vaccines are available free** to any Albertan six months and older.

**More than 1.1 million** vaccines were administered during last year's flu season.

**More than 5,300 cases** of lab-confirmed flu were recorded last year.

**Of those, 1,698 Albertans** were hospitalized with the flu in six months.

**Roughly 61 per cent** of Alberta Health Services employees were vaccinated during the 2015/16 season.

**Flu causes** more emergency room visits in the province than strokes.

**Flu was confirmed** in 62 Alberta deaths in the 2015/16 season.



## HAVE QUESTIONS?

CONTACT YOUR MEMBER SERVICES OFFICER

**CALL 1-800-232-7284**

Have your local/chapter number and worksite location ready so your call can be directed quickly.



# Union Democracy in Action

By Merryn Edwards  
Communications Staff

Most AUPE locals and chapters will hold their Annual General Meetings (AGMs) between January and May. Union Stewards can help members to understand the importance of these meetings and encourage them to make their voices heard.

Your local or chapter AGM is an opportunity to elect your AUPE representatives to speak for your interests. AGMs are also a chance to meet other members, find out what your union is up to and learn how to get involved.

For members who have never attended a union meeting, a personal invitation from a Union Steward can go a long way. Try to take the time to reach out to as many members as possible to encourage them to attend their AGM and let them know what to expect.

One of the most important activities at AGMs is the election of the local or chapter executive and other representatives. In some cases, nominations can be made ahead of time. If you are not sure about the nomination procedure, get in touch with the component executive.

In addition to inviting members to attend their AGMs and help elect their representatives, Union Stewards can help to encourage members to think about putting themselves forward for election.

Sometimes people will need a lot of encouragement. Don't give up. The most important thing to communicate is that AGMs are a key way that members can have a vote and a voice in their union. ■

## Become a Union Steward

Learn new skills, support your co-workers and help strengthen your union by becoming a Union Steward. Start by enrolling in the pre-requisite courses, including *Introduction to your Union*, *Contract Interpretation*, *Introduction to Occupational Health and Safety* and *Basic Conflict Management*. If you like what you have learned in those courses, you are ready to sign up for *Foundations for Union Stewards*.

Prerequisite courses and *Foundations for Union Stewards* are offered at various AUPE offices from September to June. Check [www.aupe.org/training/](http://www.aupe.org/training/) for registration information.

For more information or to enrol, call the Member Resource Centre at 1-800-232-7284.

### AGM Elections

Locals and chapters elect the following positions at their AGMs:

- The chair supervises the component's activities and should become familiar with the activities of AUPE overall. She calls membership and executive meetings and assigns duties to the vice-chair as required.
- The vice-chair assists the chair with his duties and may act as chair when requested.
- The secretary records accurate minutes of all meetings and maintains all books, records and minutes.
- The treasurer controls all financial and accounting documents and records. Locals and chapters may choose to combine the duties of the secretary and treasurer into a secretary-treasurer position.
- Convention delegate nominees are also elected by chapters (one nominee for every one hundred members) to attend AUPE's annual Convention. Locals elect the delegates from the pool of nominees elected at the chapter level. Locals without chapters skip the nominee stage and elect Convention delegates directly.
- Area council representatives are also elected at the chapter level as well as in locals without chapters. These representatives work within their geographical area to promote the social and general welfare of the membership through activities such as Christmas celebrations, barbeques and other social events, as well as discounted movie passes or other great deals.
- Local council representatives and alternates in the case of chapters, and provincial executive representatives and alternates in the case of locals are also elected to represent the membership at the next level of AUPE's organization.
- Occupational health and safety liaisons (elected by locals) focus on the OHS concerns of their membership and also report to the AUPE OHS Standing Committee.
- Bargaining committee representatives may also be elected at the chapter or local level if the collective agreement is up for renegotiation.

# DID YOU KNOW?

## A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE NEW ONLINE REGISTRATION PROCEDURE

AUPE strives to empower its members through knowledge, offering a full slate of courses to help achieve this goal. A new online registration system rolled out last year makes signing up for education courses easier than ever. Here's a quick look at some of the functions that make online registration a breeze.

### THE NEW ONLINE REGISTRATION

Enables you to register yourself in AUPE courses through the AUPE website



Walks you through registering for courses and ensuring appropriate prerequisites



Counts down the number of spaces left in a course



Keeps track of your course registrations



Allows for automatic waitlists



Notifies you of new courses in your area



Contains your education history



Stores copies of all AUPE Education certificates

### ONLINE REGISTRATION AT A GLANCE

Sign in to the online registration system available at [www.aupe.org/training/](http://www.aupe.org/training/) using your member number



Select a course and date (the system will ensure you meet the necessary prerequisites)



Receive an acceptance email a few weeks prior to the course



Confirm your attendance and attend the course

Steward Notes is published by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees to provide information of interest to AUPE Union Stewards, worksite contacts and other members. Topics deal with training for union activists, worksite issues, disputes and arbitrations, health and safety, trends in labour law, bargaining and related material. For more information, contact the editor.

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The goal of Steward Notes is to help today's AUPE Union Stewards do their jobs effectively. To help us, we encourage readers to submit story ideas that deserve exposure.

Story suggestions for Steward Notes may be submitted for consideration to Merryn Edwards by e-mail at [m.edwards@aupe.org](mailto:m.edwards@aupe.org). Please include names and contact information for yourself and potential story sources.

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