Response to Health Unit Vaccine Fridge Alarm

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Introduction

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) requires health units to ensure the safe storage and handling of publicly funded vaccine and ensure minimum wastage of vaccine. The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is responsible for the storage and distribution of millions of dollars' worth of publicly funded vaccine annually. The health unit has at least one vaccine refrigerator in each office.

All SMDHU vaccine fridges are connected to building generators. All SMDHU vaccine fridges are monitored by a wireless temperature alarm system (refer to Table 1 – Vaccine Fridge Alarm System for alarm system details). Alarm parameters are set to signal at temperatures below 3°C and above 7°C. This allows for response before the temperature is out of the required range of 2°C to 8°C.

Purpose

The following procedure outlines the steps that health unit staff must follow to meet MOHLTC requirements to ensure the safe vaccine storage and handling in the event of a fridge failure or power outage.

Legislative Authority

Policy Definitions and Interpretation

Policy

SMDHU Clinical Service Department is responsible for the protection of the health unit's vaccine supply and any agency staff member(s) may be called upon to secure that vaccine supply in the event of a power outage or health unit fridge failure.

An annual review of this policy and training will be provided by a Vaccine Preventable Disease (VPD) program nurse to all staff in branch offices at a branch office meeting and to all Clinical Service Department (CS) staff at a service area update.

Procedures

1. Vaccine Fridge Alarm System Procedure

During business hours upon activation the vaccine fridge alarm system will call out to a designated call list (specific to each fridge) which includes the Branch Office Program Assistant, VPD staff and VPD managers. The system will call out in sequence until someone answers the call and acknowledges the alarm.

Outside of normal business hours, including weekends and holidays upon activation the vaccine fridge alarm system will call out to a designated call list of CS management team members (same list for all vaccine fridges). The system will call out in sequence (as per Table 2 –CSD Management Contact in the Event of a Vaccine Fridge Alarm in the Appendix) until someone answers the call and acknowledges the alarm.

2. Procedure for CSD Manager Receiving After Hours Vaccine Fridge Alarm Call

The vaccine fridge alarm system will activate when:

- The fridge temperatures are out of range **which indicates no power to the fridge;**
- The fridge is malfunctioning;
  or
- There is a problem with the Vaccine Fridge Alarm System.

The following procedure outlines the steps to be taken by the CSD Manager to assess the situation:

- Log in to the Vaccine Fridge Alarm system to determine what has caused the alarm to activate.
- Contact Facilities on-call to verify if the office is without power or if the problem is isolated to the vaccine fridge.
- If it is power related, attempt to determine how long the power failure is expected to last by contacting the power company for the affected office area as noted in Table 4 – Power Company Contact Information in the Appendix.
- Utilizing the best available information, from power companies and/or the media, decide whether the vaccine can safely be moved by staff. Whenever possible another health unit office is the preferred choice for a backup facility. However, if travel to another office is not possible, there are alternate back up facilities as outlined in Table 6 – Back Up Vaccine Storage Facilities in the Appendix.
- If there is no power issues in the area, it should be assumed that the vaccine fridge is malfunctioning and vaccine will need to be transported to another facility.

Arranging for Transport of Vaccine

1. If it will not be possible to move vaccine to another SMDHU office and a backup site will be required, the CSD Manager will call the closest back-up site to the affected health unit office to request vaccine storage in a monitored refrigerator (see Table 6 – Back-Up Vaccine Storage Facilities in the Appendix).
2. Once the decision is made to transport vaccine either to another SMDHU office or a backup facility if required, the CSD Manager will attempt to contact VPD staff members who live in the geographical area of the affected office. Two staff should be sent to the office together to move the vaccine.
3. If VPD staff are not available in that area, the CSD Manager will attempt to contact any Clinical Service Department staff members who live in the geographical area of the affected office. Refer to the Staff Contact Information in the Emergency Response Manual.
4. If no Clinical Service Department staff members are available, the CSD Manager will attempt to contact the Branch Office Lead (BOL).
5. If the BOL is not available, the CSD Manager will attempt to contact any health unit staff member, starting with those who live in the geographical area of the affected office. Refer to the Staff Contact Information in the Emergency Response Manual.
    - All front line staff have access to all office locations between 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.
    - All Managers, Supervisors, Directors, MOH/AMOHs, Emergency Management Coordinators, Senior PHIs and CD on-call team have 24/7 access to all offices.
    - VPD permanent program staff also have 24/7 access to all offices for fridge alarm response purposes.
    - If front line staff require access to any health unit office to respond to a vaccine fridge alarm after the hour of 11:00 p.m. and before 6:00 a.m. and someone with 24/7 access is not available, facilities on-call staff can update their access card remotely to allow for temporary after-hours access. The CSD Manager overseeing the transfer of vaccine will need to contact on-call facilities person by calling the on-call message center number 1-888-225-7851.
    - The health unit's security provider also has 24/7 access to all offices, and can be contacted to gain access to the office if needed or to accompany staff if only one staff is available. Refer to Table 5 – Health Unit Security Provider in the Appendix.
6. Any health unit staff person may be contacted to assist with transporting vaccine to another SMDHU office or back-up facility.
7. SMDHU will support two staff members meeting at the affected health unit office in order to package vaccine and transport to the back-up facility. At no time should any staff person place themselves at risk. If two staff are not available, accompaniment can also be arranged for staff at all health unit offices by the CSD Manager by contacting the health unit security provider. Refer to Table 5 – Health Unit Security Provider in the Appendix.

8. Determine the time the staff person(s) will be at the local office where the vaccine fridge alarm has been signaled. Contact the building security company (refer to Table 3 – SMDHU Office Security Alarm Companies in the Appendix) to make them aware that staff will be entering the affected office.
9. Instruct the staff to gain entry as they normally would to their local office. Staff with 24/7 access should not activate the security alarm, however in case they do, the CSD Manager should ensure they are aware of the security code (Refer to Emergency Response Manual – Appendix E1 – Office Security Access Procedures). Staff should be informed where the fridge failure kit, emergency kit and/or rechargeable flashlight is located in each office. This information can be found in Table 7 – Location of Fridge Failure Kits in Offices in the Appendix.
10. Staff who are called out for such an event are compensated as per Agency Policy HR0601 Hours of Work or O.N.A. Collective Agreement, Article 13.04.

3. Relocating Vaccine by Health Unit Staff

In each office there is a black file box labelled "Health Unit Fridge Failure Resource Kit" located near the vaccine fridge that contains the supplies needed for moving vaccine to a backup location (refer to Table 7 – Location of Fridge Failure Kits in Offices in the Appendix).

1. Staff will refer to the *Vaccine Transportation Checklist*, which is included in the black box for instructions on packing and transporting the vaccine.
2. If the vaccine is being moved to another location:
    - An e-mail is to be sent to zzCS Vaccine Fridge Failure to advise all of the vaccine relocation.
    - When vaccine is being relocated to another health unit office, staff should leave all the coolers, packing supplies and documentation at the end office location.
    - If the vaccine is moved to an alternate back-up location, the staff should take all the coolers, packing supplies and documentation with them and drop off at the nearest health unit office the next business day.

4. Follow-up

On the next day, the CSD manager involved in the incident will contact the VPD Managers and provide an update on the situation.

The VPD Manager will:

- Ensure the cold chain report is completed if needed.
- Follow-up with the back-up facility if needed on the next business day to make arrangements for the pick-up of the vaccine and its return to the health unit.
- Send a Helpdesk ticket to Facilities if required for follow up on generator or vaccine fridge if needed.
- Provide status updates as required and notification once the situation is resolved to zzCS Vaccine Fridge Failure.

Related Policies

HR0601 – Hours of Work

Related Forms

Final Approval Signature: _____

Review/Revision History:

November 23, 2010 – Revised
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May 8, 2013 – Revised
January 24, 2014 Revised Appendix Table 2
June 20, 2014- Revised
August 10, 2016 – Revised
October 14 2016 – Revised
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December 16, 2016 – Revised
April 11, 2018 – Revised
October 9, 2018 – Revised Appendix Table 7
January 16, 2019 – Revised Appendix Table 2, Table 4
May 6, 2019 – Revised Appendix Table 7
January 24, 2024 – Revised Appendix Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5
March 11, 2024 – Revised Appendix Table 2
August 11, 2026 = Revised Appendix Table 4
November 25, 2026 – Revised Appendix Table, 2, Table 3, Table 4