



IMMUNIZATION

This document is a guideline of the Board of the College of Naturopathic Physicians of British Columbia.

These guidelines are intended to clarify the College's position on naturopathic physicians' responsibilities with respect to communications about immunizations, and to provide a standardized process and procedure for all registrants to ensure public safety.

Doctor as teacher: Patients have a right to make decisions about their health care. Naturopathic physicians may encounter patients who are concerned about, or reluctant to obtain, immunizations for themselves or their children. Naturopathic physicians are a resource for patients, and should continue to educate themselves on the most up-to-date scientific information to ensure that they can assist their patients in making informed health care decisions.

Naturopathic physicians must always act within the scope of their practice based on their knowledge, qualifications, and skill, and must practice in a manner that is in keeping with their ethical, professional, and legal obligations.

Registrants must not counsel a patient against obtaining immunizations in the absence of a sound, and properly documented, medical rationale for doing so. **Only registrants who have met the standards and requirements for College certification in *Immunization*, and who maintain this certification with the College, are authorized to prescribe or administer vaccines.** If a patient decides not to immunize themselves or a child, the registrant must document that decision, and must attempt to obtain a signed informed consent that includes the specifics set out below in Section B2.

A. COMMUNICATIONS

- 1. Naturopathic physicians must ensure that their professional advertising and public communications are accurate and truthful.** Registrants are reminded to be aware of and comply with the College's Advertising Policy. These expectations are consistent with the College Bylaws made under the *Health Professions Act*, as well requirements set out in court decisions and other legal precedents.

2. **Naturopathic physicians must not advertise, offer, promote, provide, or recommend alternatives to immunizations** including, but not limited to, through use of the following terms¹:
 - a) Flu shot alternative, natural flu shot or similar claim
 - b) Natural immunization
 - c) Homeopathic immunization
3. **Naturopathic physicians must not make statements that may be misconstrued or misrepresented as advertising, offering, promoting, providing, or recommending alternatives to immunizations.**

B. PATIENT CONSULTATIONS

1. **When discussing immunizations with a patient, parent or guardian, naturopathic physicians must:**
 - a) Document the occurrence of a discussion regarding immunization within the patient's clinical record, noting the parent or guardian's name, if applicable;
 - b) Counsel the patient (or parent or guardian), to the best of their ability and knowledge, about the benefits and risks associated with immunization or the lack thereof, so that the patient can make an informed decision; and
 - c) Document the details of the discussion, including the rationale for providing any specific advice, within the patient's clinical record.
2. **When discussing immunizations with a patient, parent or guardian, naturopathic physicians must be clear regarding the following:**
 - a) That naturopathic treatments are not guaranteed to prevent the childhood diseases or infections that are targeted by vaccines;
 - b) That there is an inherent risk of contracting the disease or infection if the patient is not conventionally immunized; and
 - c) Confirmation that the patient (or parent or guardian) understands that naturopathic treatment is not a substitute for the efficacy or security of immunizations.

¹ Vaccines are as defined in the BC CDC Communicable Disease Control Immunization Program – Section 1A – Introduction, on page 15, available online: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/communicable-disease-control-manual/immunization>

3. **When discussing immunizations with a patient, parent or guardian, naturopathic physicians must** consider the following vaccine information contained in HealthLinkBC Files or other provincial resources, if applicable, as recommended in the *BC Centre for Disease Control's Communicable Disease Control Immunization Program*:²
- a) Benefits of vaccination (personal, community)
 - b) Risk of not getting vaccinated (possibility of getting the disease)
 - c) Eligibility for the vaccine(s)
 - d) Common and expected adverse events
 - e) Possible serious or severe adverse events and their frequency
 - f) Contraindications
 - g) Disease(s) being prevented
4. **If a patient, parent or guardian decides not to immunize, and before administering any naturopathic treatments, a naturopathic physician must document the decision, confirming that the discussion included the requirements set out above (see Section B2), and must attempt to obtain a signed informed consent that includes this information.**

Procedurally, if the consent form is more than one page, the patient (or parent or guardian) must initial each page. The original signed consent form must be retained for the clinical record, and the patient (or parent or guardian) must be provided with a copy.

Naturopathic physicians may seek advice on these issues by contacting the College and asking to speak to a member of the Registrar's staff, or by seeking medical legal advice.

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² For more details, see the BC CDC Communicable Disease Control Immunization Program – Section 1B – Informed Consent for Immunization, available online: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/communicable-disease-control-manual/immunization>