

SUBJECT: Prevention of Shoulder Injury Related to Vaccine Administration (SIRVA)

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Pages: 1

To: Immunizers, Health Care Providers

From: Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health

Shoulder Injury Related to Vaccine Administration

Shoulder injury related to vaccine administration (SIRVA) is a preventable occurrence caused by injection of a vaccine into the shoulder capsule rather than the deltoid muscle. It is caused by incorrect technique or landmarking for intramuscular deltoid injections, most commonly injecting too high and/or too deep. As a result, inflammation of the shoulder structures may cause patients to experience persistent shoulder pain and a decreased range of motion. Symptoms typically being within 48 hours of vaccine administration and they do not improve with over-the-counter analgesic medications.

Immunizers can prevent SIRVA and other injection site issues by reviewing and adopting proper landmarking and injection techniques. Key points to remember when landmarking for adults:

- Ensure that the patient is sitting down and the shoulder is completely exposed.
- Ensure your fingers are on the acromion. If in doubt have the patient gently move the shoulder so you can find the joint.
- Unless you have very large hands/fingers use **three** fingers to landmark the top of the triangle.
- It is safe to inject a bit below this line but do not inject above this line
- If you inject too high and too deep you will inject into the rotator cuff which is only ¼ to ½ inch below the skin at that point of the deltoid setting the patient up for SIRVA.

For more information, please review the following resources:

[Shoulder Injury Related to Vaccine Administration and Other Injection Site Events](#) (Canadian Family Physician)

[Immunization Technique for Intramuscular \(IM\) Injections – Deltoid Muscle](#) (Public Health Ontario)

[SIRVA Prevention Made Easy](#) (video by University of Waterloo/Ontario College of Pharmacists)

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