

Special Bulletin

from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health



Date: December 17, 2020

To: Nova Scotia Health Care Providers (including 811/911)

Topic: COVID-19 Immunization

Nova Scotia received its' first shipment of COVID-19 vaccine in the province on December 15, 2020. Nova Scotia continues to expect limited quantities of vaccine in December and into the first quarter of 2021. Due to the limited initial quantities of vaccine, priority populations have been identified to receive vaccine. The approach of Nova Scotia's immunization plan is to provide vaccine to priority populations/groups aligning with National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommendations. Other factors, such as logistic restrictions, were also considered in the prioritization of the populations for early immunization. Those who work in the following areas will receive the vaccine in the initial phase, beginning with those located in Central Zone:

- COVID-19 units in hospitals
- Emergency departments
- Critical care units
- Birth unit and early labour unit at the IWK Health Centre
- Regional care units

As the immunization program progresses and as more vaccine is available to Nova Scotia, additional priority populations will be identified to be eligible for the vaccine.

For the initial phase of the COVID-19 immunization program, vaccination will be done by Public Health, Nova Scotia Health Authority and Long-Term Care staff. Vaccine will not be made available to community-based care providers. Planning for subsequent phases of the COVID-19 immunization program will include discussions about the potential roles for community-based health care providers.

For the time being, the following guidance on contraindications for the Pfizer vaccine (at this time the only vaccine available in Nova Scotia) include anyone who:

- Is under 16 years of age
- Is immunosuppressed due to disease or treatment or has an auto-immune disorder
- Is pregnant, think they may be pregnant or plan to become pregnant
- Is breastfeeding
- Has history of anaphylactic reaction in the past to any of the components in the vaccine or its' container
- Has any problems after their first dose of this vaccine, such as an allergic reaction or breathing problem

As the contraindication for immunocompromised populations in the current NACI document are not considered "absolute", otherwise eligible persons wishing to get vaccinated may be referred to the IWK Special Immunization Clinic (SIC) for further evaluation.

However, health care workers are being offered individual informed consent related to the specific NACI discretionary recommendations related to immunosuppression, autoimmune disorders, pregnancy, breastfeeding and anaphylaxis, and may be offered vaccine if the discussion with occupational health clinicians leads to a decision in favour of vaccine.

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Under the Nova Scotia Health Protection Act and the Regulations under the Act, an Adverse Event Following Immunization is notifiable and must be reported to the Medical Officer of Health, through the local Public Health office in accordance with the details outlined on the poster titled [*It's the Law: Reporting of Adverse Events Following Immunization*](#).

The vaccine does not provide guaranteed immunity and the current clinical trials cannot rule out the possibility of asymptomatic transmission in immunized individuals. Therefore, it is critical to continue with public health measures and Nova Scotians should continue to follow the gathering limits as per the Health Protection Act Order and practice staying home if unwell, frequent hand hygiene, cough/sneeze etiquette, maintaining physical distancing and wearing non-medical masks.

As with all new vaccines, information is evolving and will change over time. Further communication will be provided as new information and additional vaccine products becomes available. More detailed information is available at:

- [NACI's Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccine\(s\)](#)
- [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine](#)