

COVID-19 Vaccine

To develop our vaccination plan, Nova Scotia is following guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.

From January to April, Phase 1 of provincewide vaccination focuses on:

- front-line healthcare workers who are closely involved in the COVID-19 response (more likely to be exposed to COVID-19)
- residents, staff and designated caregivers of long-term care facilities
- residents and staff of residential care facilities, adult residential centres and regional rehabilitation centres
- seniors living in the community who are 80 or older
- seniors living in the community who are 75 to 79
- healthcare workers (like doctors, paramedics and homecare workers) who are in direct contact with patients

Planning is underway for Phase 2, which should start in the spring and will include remaining healthcare workers and essential workers. Once all key groups have been vaccinated, we anticipate starting Phase 3 in the summer to vaccinate people in the broader community. We aim to vaccinate 75% of Nova Scotians by the end of September. This is subject to availability of vaccine.

There will be a lot of communication as the vaccine rolls out to ensure Nova Scotians know when they may be able to get immunized.

In the meantime, we ask Nova Scotians to be patient and continue to be vigilant about the public health measures. At least for the initial phases of rolling out the vaccine, we will still need to wear a mask, stay 2 metres/6 feet apart from others, practice proper hand hygiene, follow gathering limits, and stay home if you're sick.

WHO GETS VACCINATED WHEN?

When will the vaccine start rolling out?

We received our first shipment of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine on December 15 and vaccination started December 16. We received our first shipment of Moderna vaccine on December 30. Nova Scotians are being vaccinated over three phases that focus on different key groups based on priority.

When will people who are not in key groups start getting vaccinated?

Once all key groups have been vaccinated, people in the broader community can get the vaccine as it becomes available, likely starting in the summer. We aim to vaccinate 75% of Nova Scotians by the end of September. This is subject to availability of vaccine.

In the meantime, we ask Nova Scotians to be patient and continue to be vigilant about the public health measures. At least for the initial phases of rolling out the vaccine, we will all still need to wear a mask, stay 2 metres/6 feet apart from others, practice proper hand hygiene, follow gathering limits, and stay home if unwell.

How will I know when it's time for me to get vaccinated?

There will be a lot of communication as the vaccine rolls out to ensure Nova Scotians know when they may be able to get vaccinated.

Is there a wait list people can get on for early vaccination if they have a condition that makes them vulnerable? Can you apply or appeal to get it earlier?

No. We understand that Nova Scotians are eager to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, but we must ensure people who need it most receive it first. We expect it will be fall before everyone in Nova Scotia who wants a vaccination will get one.

Is there enough vaccine for everyone?

Yes. The federal government has secured enough vaccine to vaccinate everyone who wants it. We expect it will be fall before everyone in Nova Scotia who wants a vaccination to get one.

Where will people get vaccinated?

The initial clinics are being organized for healthcare workers and priority groups scheduled by the Nova Scotia Health Authority. The vaccine we have right now has complex and specific transportation and storage requirements that we have to follow or we risk wasting vaccine. Until we start getting vaccine that can be easily transported and stored without special freezers, we cannot deliver it through doctor's offices or pharmacies.

Will we ever be able to get vaccinated in a doctor's office or pharmacy?

During Phase 1 (January to April), we are taking steps to expand who can give the vaccine and where it can be given. This is to prepare us for later phases when larger shipments of vaccine arrive. When more information about this is available, it will be announced publicly.

Are international students eligible get vaccinated?

International students in Nova Scotia can get vaccinated free of charge. When they can get vaccinated depends on the provincial rollout plan based on key groups.

Are other non-residents eligible to get vaccinated if they are in Nova Scotia?

Non-residents can get vaccinated free of charge. When they can get vaccinated depends on the provincial rollout plan based on key groups.

KEY GROUPS FOR VACCINATION**Why did vaccination start only in Central Zone? Why not provincewide?**

First, we had a limited number of doses. Second, there are strict transportation, handling, and storage requirements of the Pfizer vaccine. It must be stored at -70°C in a special freezer. Initially, these special freezers were only available in Central Zone. Third, our epidemiology in the province at the time demonstrated outbreaks and clusters within Central Zone.

We now have cold storage sites around the province: Halifax, Sydney, Colchester, Kentville and Yarmouth. These sites coupled with more vaccine will allow us to roll out vaccination across the province, starting with priority groups.

Who received the vaccine in December?

The first immunization clinic, operated by Public Health, started December 16 for people who work in Central Zone in the following areas:

- COVID-19 units in hospitals
- emergency departments
- critical care units
- birth unit and early labour unit at the IWK Health Centre
- regional care units

We also started vaccinating long-term care staff who are directly involved in patient care in Central Zone, including designated caregivers.

Who is next in line to get vaccinated?

From January to April, Phase 1 of provincewide vaccination focuses on:

- front-line healthcare workers who are closely involved in the COVID-19 response (more likely to be exposed to COVID-19)
- residents, staff and designated caregivers of long-term care facilities
- residents and staff of residential care facilities, adult residential centres and regional rehabilitation centres
- seniors living in the community who are 80 or older
- seniors living in the community who are 75 to 79
- healthcare workers (like doctors, paramedics and homecare workers) who are in direct contact with patients

How many people are in the first priority groups for vaccination?

The following people are in the first priority groups:

- About 30,000 staff and residents in long-term care and residential care facilities
- About 86,000 Nova Scotians who are 75 and older
- About 14,000 healthcare workers whose work involves direct contact with patients (starting with about 7000 staff directly involved with COVID-19 response)

Where are vaccinations happening around the province?

Vaccination clinics for healthcare workers are operating in several parts of Nova Scotia in January:

- Cape Breton Regional Hospital will start a clinic January 11 with 1,950 doses
- Valley Regional Hospital will start a clinic January 11 with 1,950 doses
- Colchester East Hants Health Centre will start a clinic January 19 with 2,925 doses
- Vaccinations will also start in January at three long-term care facilities in Central Zone – Northwood (Halifax campus), Shannex (Parkstone) and Oceanview

When will other healthcare and essential workers start getting the vaccine?

Planning is underway for Phase 2 of provincewide vaccination which should start in the spring. It will include remaining healthcare workers and essential workers. Public health is working on criteria for who will be considered an essential worker for vaccination purposes.

Who is considered an essential worker for vaccination purposes?

We are developing that definition now. It will not be simply a worker who is considered essential in a certain jurisdiction. The definition will reflect many factors such as how essential a service is, how much risk of importing the virus is associated with it, how much risk there is of transmission in a particular service's environment, and more. This key group is scheduled for vaccination in Phase 2 which should start this spring.

When will Nova Scotians who are vulnerable because of certain health conditions get vaccinated?

We are following national guidelines to develop our vaccination plan. At this point, we have identified all the key groups to be vaccinated in Phase 1 and we've started identifying them for Phase 2. As our plans continue to develop, we will share information about when other people can be vaccinated.

When will Nova Scotians who don't fall in any priority group get vaccinated?

We anticipate Phase 3 will begin in summer and will include all Nova Scotians who are not part of the Phase 1 and 2 key groups.

Will you transport nursing home residents to the hospital or, by the time they can get it, will you be able to bring it to the nursing home?

Our goal is to always get the vaccine as close to the person who is receiving it as possible. We will move the product as close to people as we can, respecting the requirements needed to safely transport, store, and administer the vaccine.

HOW DOES THE VACCINE WORK**Do you only need one dose of the vaccine? Is it delivered via a needle?**

Health Canada has secured several brands of COVID-19 vaccine, but currently only the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are approved for use. These two brands are delivered through a needle into the muscle of the upper arm and they both require a second dose either 21 or 28 days apart.

Do you need a new vaccination every year, like the flu shot?

At this time, it is unknown how long the protection will last. As vaccination rolls out, national groups will evaluate the data and provide an update how long the protection lasts and whether there may be a need for additional doses.

Is there a fee for the vaccine?

The vaccine is free to everyone who wants it.

Are there side effects of the vaccine? People in other countries are having serious adverse reactions.

Like any medication, vaccines can cause side effects or reactions. The most common is soreness at the site of injection. Serious adverse reactions are extremely low and rare – less than one in a million.

What happens when someone has a serious adverse reaction?

If you believe you're having a serious adverse reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine, you should speak to a healthcare provider or call 811. Healthcare providers in Nova Scotia are required by law to report certain adverse events following immunization to Public Health at the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. The vaccines currently approved or under review by Health Canada do not contain the virus. Therefore, they cannot give you COVID-19.

Will the vaccine be mandatory for anybody? What about healthcare workers and others who work in patient care?

We strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated to protect themselves, the people around them, and the people they care for. Vaccination is not mandatory for anybody.

Because the vaccine is not mandatory, how many people do you think will choose to receive it?

We do not know how many Nova Scotians will choose to receive the vaccine. We strongly encourage vaccination, but it is voluntary.

Ontario says it may require people to show proof they have received the COVID-19 vaccine in order to travel or attend activities in communal spaces. Will Nova Scotians require proof of immunization?

Nova Scotians will be able to access a record of immunization, like they can for other vaccines they have received.

WHO SHOULD NOT GET VACCINATED?**Are there circumstances in which I should not get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

The vaccine should not be given to people who have had a severe allergic reaction to any of the vaccine ingredients.

This vaccine is not recommended for people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, immunosuppressed or who have an autoimmune disorder. These populations have not been included in vaccine clinical trials to date, and so the safety and efficacy of the vaccine in these populations is not known.

However, COVID-19 vaccine may be offered to individuals in these populations if a risk assessment deems the benefits outweigh the potential risks for the individual, and if informed consent includes discussion about the absence of evidence on the use of COVID-19 vaccine in these populations.

Please speak with your healthcare provider about your concerns.

If a woman or couple is currently trying to get pregnant, should they wait or have a pregnancy test before getting vaccinated?

You can speak with your healthcare provider. The national recommendation is that women should wait 28 days after receiving the vaccine to conceive.

If the vaccine cannot be given to anyone younger than 16, how will we protect our children?

We know some groups will be unable to be vaccinated. It is important for those who can be immunized, to get immunized, to protect others. As more information about the use of vaccine in younger people becomes available from Health Canada, we will adjust our immunization efforts.

IMMUNITY

How long does it take for the vaccine to provide protection or immunity?

To provide appropriate immunity, you must have both doses of the vaccine. The currently approved vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) have demonstrated high efficacy one to two weeks after the second dose.

If I receive the vaccine does that mean I no longer have to wear a mask, physical distance or follow other public health measures?

At least for the initial phases of rolling out the vaccine, we will all still need to wear a mask, stay 2 metres/6 feet apart from others, practice proper hand hygiene, follow gathering limits, and stay home if unwell. That includes people who are vaccinated. It's important to remember that some people cannot be vaccinated. We all need to do our part to protect the people around us, as well as ourselves.

Why are vaccinated people still required to follow public health measures? Isn't that the point of a vaccine?

Although we know the vaccine is highly effective in preventing symptomatic COVID-19, the vaccine needs to be studied further to make sure that people who have received it can't transmit the virus asymptotically. Until the majority of Nova Scotians have been vaccinated, all residents and visitors in Nova Scotia are required to follow all public health measures.

How long will we need to practice public health measures even though we have a vaccine?

It is difficult to say. As more information becomes available from vaccine studies, guidance will be provided.

If I was already COVID-positive, will I still need the vaccine?

Yes, you should get vaccinated.

VACCINE SUPPLY

How many doses of vaccine have we purchased?

Vaccine has been secured by the federal government, and they are providing each province with their share. Nova Scotia expects to receive more than a million doses – enough for more than 500,000 people – over the next six months. We expect to get 140,000 doses between January and April and about another million doses between April and June.

How much of each type of vaccine has Nova Scotia received?

We received a total 5,850 doses of the Pfizer vaccine and 3,700 doses of the Moderna vaccine in December. More of both types is coming (as noted above).

Which vaccines are being given to which key groups so far?

We used 2,720 Pfizer doses in December for the following workers in central zone and held 2,720 doses for their second dose:

- COVID-19 units in hospitals
- emergency departments
- critical care units
- birth unit and early labour unit at the IWK Health Centre

- regional care units
- long-term care staff who are directly involved in patient care, including designated caregivers

We're allocating the 3,700 doses of Moderna vaccine for Northwood (Halifax campus), Shannex (Parkstone) and Oceanview.

Where will the vaccine be stored?

We have a well-established process for receiving and distributing vaccine and we are adapting our process for a product that requires special storage. We now have cold storage sites around the province: Halifax, Sydney, Colchester, Kentville and Yarmouth.

What is the role of the Canadian Armed Forces?

The Canadian Armed Forces has assigned five specialists in logistics who we can use as needed. They are experts in logistics and project management with access to an array of resources to support our vaccination efforts.

What is the status of other COVID-19 vaccines?

The federal government is responsible for securing the COVID-19 vaccine. Health Canada approves vaccines for use. They've approved the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to date, and Nova Scotia has received doses of both.

How many people can you immunize in a day?

This depends on how many people choose to get vaccinated and how many clinics or providers are offering the vaccine at any given time. When we received our vaccine in December, we were able to vaccinate about 350 people per day. This will increase as more clinics come online.

These are new vaccines that were rushed through approvals. Is it safe?

Canada is recognized around the world for high standards for vaccine review, approvals, and monitoring systems. After a vaccine is approved for use, evidence on safety and effectiveness is reviewed by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. It provides recommendations on immunizations for individuals and for public health programs.

Health Canada only approves a vaccine if it is supported by robust scientific data and evidence. A similar process was used in 2009 to review and authorize the H1N1 pandemic vaccine. There is no reason to believe that the vaccine is not safe. Like other viruses, the best defence is vaccination.

Where can volunteers sign up to help with immunization?

The Nova Scotia Health Authority is creating a special COVID-19 volunteer pool to provide support to our caregivers and health care teams. There are volunteer opportunities across Nova Scotia. If you are interested in volunteering in an immunization clinic or supporting the response to COVID-19 in another area, please [complete the volunteer application form](#) and Volunteer Services team will contact you to discuss potential opportunities.

Where can I learn more?

There is [vaccine information for Nova Scotia](#) on our website. The federal government has [general information about COVID-19 vaccination](#) as well as [detailed information about each approved vaccine](#) . There is also information for public health professionals at the [Canadian Vaccination Evidence Resource and Exchange Centre](#).