

# Special Bulletin

from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health



**Date:** February 26, 2021

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

**Re:** Updates on COVID-19 Vaccine Program and COVID-19 Testing

## **Nova Scotia COVID-19 Vaccine Program**

Nova Scotia received its' first shipment of COVID-19 vaccine in the province on December 15, 2020. Since December, the province has continued to receive limited quantities of Pfizer and Moderna and this delivery pattern is expected until the end of March 2021. Currently, the Federal Government is forecasting a significant increase in vaccine starting in the April timeframe and as the vaccine supply increases, more Nova Scotians will be offered vaccine. Public Health is hosting healthcare clinics and various prototypes which will help inform the best way to operationalize clinics throughout the province as vaccine supply increases.

The first community vaccine clinic for seniors aged 80 and older opened at the IWK Health Centre on February 22, 2021. Additional community clinics for those 80 and older will follow with four opening on March 8<sup>th</sup> in Halifax (IWK), Truro, Sydney and Kentville; three more on March 15<sup>th</sup> in Halifax (Forum), Antigonish and Yarmouth; and three on March 22<sup>nd</sup> in Amherst, Bridgewater and Dartmouth. During the week of February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Millbrook First Nation is the first of 13 Mi'kmaw communities to host a COVID-19 vaccination clinic. Provider-based prototype clinics in pharmacies will also begin in March. Pharmacists and physicians will soon be able to administer vaccine at clinics.

In order to protect the most at risk and to provide rapid delivery of the vaccine, the province has adopted a model to provide vaccine based on age groups. Other than age, considerations for when Nova Scotians can receive the vaccine include:

- recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines from the [National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\)](#)
- COVID-19 disease epidemiology in Nova Scotia
- vaccine supply

At this time, there are two COVID-19 mRNA vaccines, [Pfizer-BioNtech](#) and [Moderna](#), approved for use in Canada and available in Nova Scotia. It is anticipated that Nova Scotia will receive other brands of COVID-19 vaccine as they are approved for use by Health Canada. The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) has developed a COVID-19 vaccine educational resource for health care providers. The *COVID-19 Vaccine Program- Information for Health Care Professionals* document is available online at: <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/info-for-professionals.asp> and by accessing the 'Immunization' tab. Within this evergreen document, there is general information pertaining to the authorized COVID-19 vaccines; an overview of vaccine safety and adverse events following immunization (AEFI) reporting requirements; and storage, dosing, scheduling and administration details for the currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines. The evidence on COVID-19 disease and vaccines is evolving. The OCMOH will continue to monitor the evidence and recommendations from the NACI and update the *Information for Professionals* evergreen document online as needed and as more products are available in Nova Scotia.

All Nova Scotians must continue to practice public health measures during the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. Evidence is evolving on the duration of protection and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines in preventing asymptomatic infection and reducing transmission of SARS-CoV-2. Nova Scotians need to adhere to the gathering limits as per the Health Protection Act Order and stay home if unwell, practice frequent hand hygiene, cough/sneeze etiquette, maintain physical distancing and wear non-medical masks.

## COVID-19 Testing

Testing is a key part of our defence against COVID-19. Given the variant strains and case numbers in Newfoundland and elsewhere in Canada, this is an important step to help protect everyone. Throughout COVID-19 we have been using symptom screening as a main way to identify people who require testing. In late November 2020, we added asymptomatic testing through both Primary Assessment Centres (PACs) and Public Health mobile units using PCR testing, along with “pop—up” testing using rapid antigen testing.

Many of the recent cases of COVID-19 we are seeing in Nova Scotia are presenting with mild cold-like symptoms or often even just one symptom. As a result, we are shifting our on-line screening for testing as well as our public messaging to accommodate this type of clinical presentation. Your assistance in making sure that your patients are aware of the Public Health messages on COVID-19 testing is appreciated:

- make regular asymptomatic testing part of your personal COVID protection plan
- if you feel unwell, even with only one mild, cold-like symptom, book a test through the 811 on-line assessment <https://covid-self-assessment.novascotia.ca/en> or by calling 811

People who have one mild symptom, other than fever or new or worsening cough, do not have to isolate while waiting for their test and results. The online self-assessment has been updated to reflect this. Isolation pending tests results continues to be required for fever or new or worsening cough or **two** of the following symptoms:

- runny nose/nasal congestion
- sore throat
- headache
- shortness of breath.

Testing continues to be available by appointment at PACs around the province. Pop-up sites offering rapid tests are continuing in locations around the province for people who are 16 or older and have no symptoms.