

Memorandum

To: Health Care Providers

From: Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer of Health

Date: September 17, 2021

Re: Valid Medical Contraindication for COVID-19 Vaccination

Nova Scotia's Proof of Vaccine Policy intends to provide a layer of protection as Nova Scotia enters the fourth wave of COVID-19, while allowing businesses to remain fully open with the removal of other restrictions such as gathering limits and spacing requirements. Proof of vaccination that demonstrates an individual is fully immunized against COVID-19 will be required to access some events, services, and businesses. Valid proof of vaccine includes an official vaccine receipt issued by a jurisdiction or health authority.

The Proof of Vaccine Policy allows exemptions for individuals who have a valid medical contraindication against receiving COVID-19 vaccine. Religious and conscientious exemptions will not be considered. Valid medical exemptions are limited in number:

- a history of severe allergic reaction (e.g., anaphylaxis) after previous administration of a COVID-19 vaccine using a similar platform (mRNA or viral vector);
- an allergy to any component of the specific COVID-19 vaccine or its container [polyethylene glycol (PEG) for Pfizer's Comirnaty™ and Moderna's Spikevax™ COVID-19 vaccines];
- a history of major venous and/or arterial thrombosis with thrombocytopenia following vaccination with AstraZeneca's Vaxzevria™ COVID-19 vaccine;
- a history of capillary leak syndrome (CLS) following vaccination with AstraZeneca's Vaxzevria™ COVID-19 vaccine
- a history of myocarditis and/or pericarditis after a first dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer Comirnaty™ or Moderna Spikevax™);
- A history of a serious adverse event following immunization (AEFI) after the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, with "serious" defined using the World Health Organization (WHO) standard definition¹: an AEFI that results in death, is life-threatening, requires in-patient hospitalization or prolongs an existing hospitalization, results in persistent or significant disability/incapacity, or in a congenital anomaly/birth defect.

The Department of Health and Wellness has prepared a template letter for physicians and nurse practitioners to use to certify that patients meet criteria for a medical exemption against COVID-19 vaccination. Individuals claiming a medical exemption will be required to have this template

¹ ICH Expert Working Group. ICH harmonised tripartite guideline: clinical safety data management: definitions and standards for expedited reporting E2A [Internet]. Version 4. Geneva: ICH; 1994 [cited 2021 Sept 12]. Available from: https://database.ich.org/sites/default/files/E2A_Guideline.pdf

letter. Substitute letters or provider notes claiming medical exemption will not be accepted. To assist in the prevention of fraudulent activity, primary care providers need to take appropriate actions to protect the security of the template letter. A paper copy or a secured .pdf electronic version of the letter is recommended. Further information will be forthcoming regarding Nova Scotians without access to a primary care provider.

As a precaution, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends that people who experienced myocarditis and/or pericarditis after a first dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer Comirnaty™ or Moderna Spikevax™) should defer their second dose of mRNA vaccine until more information is available. Hence a history of myocarditis and/or pericarditis after a first dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer Comirnaty™ or Moderna Spikevax™) constitutes a valid medical exemption for the purposes of the Proof of Vaccine policy.

We also recognize that some individuals will have had a serious adverse event following immunization (AEFI) after the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. A history of a serious adverse event after a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine will also constitute a valid medical exemption for the purposes of the Proof of Vaccine policy. Medical and scientific judgement should be exercised in these situations.

Immunosuppression, auto-immune disorders, pregnancy and breastfeeding are not contraindications to COVID-19 immunization. Of note is the rarity of a confirmed PEG allergy in individuals. Physicians or nurse practitioners who are seeking a formal provider-to-provider allergy consultation may send such a written consult directly to Halifax Allergy and Asthma Associates via fax at 902-425-3928. Tromethamine (trometamol or Tris) and polysorbate 80 are potential allergens included in the Moderna Spikevax™ COVID-19 vaccine and viral vector vaccines (AstraZeneca Vaxzevria™ and Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine), respectively or their containers. However, tromethamine allergy is not a contraindication against Pfizer Comirnaty™ COVID-19 vaccination and polysorbate 80 allergy is not a contraindication for mRNA (Pfizer Comirnaty™ or Moderna Spikevax™) COVID-19 vaccination.

If physicians or nurse practitioners have questions regarding COVID-19 vaccines for adults, they may send a written referral to Nova Scotia Health Infectious Diseases at 902-473-7394. Questions regarding COVID-19 vaccines for children and adolescents may be referred in writing to IWK Pediatric Infectious Diseases at 902-470-7232. Referring practitioners are encouraged to provide a contact number where they can be reached directly in lieu of an office phone number not equipped to accept messages.

More details regarding contraindications can be found in the following resources:

1. The “contraindications and precautions” section of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) statement on COVID-19 vaccines:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines.html>
2. SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine Testing & Administration Guidance for Allergists/Immunologists from the CSACI: ([2021-04-10 UPDATE - COVID-19 Vaccine Testing & Administration Guidance \(csaci.ca\)](https://www.csaci.ca/2021-04-10-UPDATE-COVID-19-Vaccine-Testing-Administration-Guidance))
3. Resources for health care professionals, including those to support patients with needle phobias and anxiety: [Information-for-Health-Care-Professionals-COVID-19-Vaccine-Program.pdf \(novascotia.ca\)](https://www.novascotia.ca/health-care-professionals-covid-19-vaccine-program)
4. Information about Nova Scotia’s vaccination program, including in-home vaccination:

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): vaccine - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada](#)

5. Information about Nova Scotia's Drop-in vaccine clinics: [Drop-in vaccine clinics | Nova Scotia Health Authority \(nshealth.ca\)](#)