

COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ
Updated: December 15, 2020

When will I get the vaccine?

As COVID-19 vaccine starts to become available, Nova Scotia is following guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. During the first three months of 2021, the focus will be to immunize:

- long-term care residents and staff
- front-line healthcare workers who are closely involved in the COVID 19 response
- seniors who live in the community, beginning with people who are over 80 years old, then people over 75, and then people over 70.

It will likely be spring 2021 before we can expand beyond these risk groups and into other healthcare workers and essential workers. This will happen after the initial groups are completed. It will most likely be summer 2021 before we can start offering vaccine to the broader community.

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 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.

When will the vaccine start rolling out?

Nova Scotia will receive its first shipment of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine on December 15. Immunizations will begin December 16.

We are following [national guidelines for the initial doses](#). During the first three months of 2021, the focus will be to immunize:

- long-term care residents and staff
- health care workers directly involved in the COVID 19 response
- seniors who live in the community, beginning with people who are over 80 years old, then people over 75, and then people over 70.

Why is vaccine being used only in Central Zone in December?

Due to the strict transportation, handling, and storage requirements of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, it must be stored at a temperature of minus 70 degrees Celsius in a special freezer. Currently, freezers capable to store the vaccine are currently only available in Central Zone. As we receive more vaccine, we are planning for distribution across the province and wide scale availability.

Who in Central Zone is receiving the vaccine in December?

The first immunization clinic, operated by Nova Scotia Public Health, will start Wednesday, Dec. 16. Those who work in the following areas will receive the vaccine this month:

- 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 directly involved in patient care in Central Zone, including designated caregivers will receive the vaccine in December. All other long-term care staff, including designated caregivers across the province will receive the vaccine between January and March.

When will other people start getting the vaccine?

We are following [national guidelines for vaccinating priority populations](#). It will likely be spring 2021 before we can expand beyond these risk groups and into other healthcare workers and essential workers. It will most likely be summer 2021 before we can start offering vaccine to the broader community.

This is a rolling plan that will see other groups added as more vaccine becomes available.

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 with limited vaccine supply we must ensure those that needs it most, receive it first. It will take several months before everyone who wants a vaccine gets one.

Is there enough vaccine for everyone?

The federal government has secured enough vaccine to vaccinate everyone who wants it. We expect it could take almost a year to vaccinate everyone who wants it.

Where will people get vaccinated?

The initial clinics are being organized and priority groups scheduled by the Nova Scotia Health Authority. The vaccine we have right now has complex and specific transportation and storage requirements. 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.

Do you only need one dose of the vaccine? Is it delivered via a needle?

All but one of the vaccines secured by Health Canada require two doses either 21 or 28 days apart. The Pfizer vaccine requires two doses. It is delivered through a needle into the muscle of the upper arm.

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, Health Canada 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.

Is there anyone who cannot get vaccinated?

The Pfizer vaccine is not recommended for 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 breast-feeding

- has had an anaphylactic reaction in the past.
- has any problems after their first dose of this vaccine, such as an allergic reaction or breathing problem

We will share more information about other vaccines as it becomes available.

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 vaccine becomes available, public health measures will remain in place for everyone – including anyone who has received the vaccine.

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

To provide appropriate immunity, you must have both doses of the Pfizer vaccine. It takes seven days after the second dose is received.

How effective is the Pfizer vaccine? Am I guaranteed to be immune to COVID-19 if I get vaccinated?

The Pfizer vaccine that Health Canada has approved is 95% effective in preventing COVID-19. This means a person who gets vaccinated can still be infected, but the vaccine greatly reduces the risk of infection and of the infection becoming a more severe form of the disease.

If I receive the vaccine does that mean I no longer have to wear a mask, social 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.

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.

Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?

The vaccines currently approved or under review by Health Canada do not contain the virus. Therefore, they cannot give you COVID-19.

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

Yes, you should get vaccinated. We do not know enough yet about immunity that people may have if they have recovered from 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.

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 is expected to receive 150,000 doses, enough to vaccinate 75,000 people, between now and the end of March 2021. More will be coming.

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.

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.

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

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.

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. We expect the Moderna vaccine to be available in December.

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.

Where can I learn more?

The federal government has [general information about COVID-19 vaccination](#) as well as [detailed information about each approved vaccine](#).