



NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

December 17, 2020

Update on COVID-19 Vaccines

On December 15th, NLMA attended a briefing by Dr. Janice Fitzgerald about COVID-19 vaccine priority groups. A second briefing was held with Eastern Health on December 16th. The following is a summary of those briefings:

The first shipment of vaccine was received this week. The province is receiving two types of vaccine in the first quarter (Pizer and Moderna). The goal in the first quarter is not herd immunity, but protection for those most vulnerable and those at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. It is anticipated that 35,000 to 47,000 people will be vaccinated in first quarter or about 6% of the population.

Pfizer vaccine – must be stored at -70 degrees Celsius. It requires a ultralow temperature freezer for storage. The vaccine arrived in a thermal shipper, which will maintain it for 30 days as long as dry ice is replaced every five days. It can only be opened twice a day. The vaccine will thaw in 30 minutes at room temp and 3 hours in a refrigerator. It can be stored in a fridge for 5 days once thawed. At present, it can only be administered at the shipment delivery point. This will be the Health Sciences Centre (Memorial Medical School), which has an ultralow temp freezer. The vaccine cannot be shipped to another site at this time. The vaccine requires two doses at 21 days apart. The first shipment arrived with 1,950 doses for 975 people.

Moderna vaccine – This vaccine is advancing through approvals at Health Canada and could be available soon. It can be stored at -20 degrees Celsius, which means it can be kept in a regular freezer and can be transported in a specialized a credo cube. It is stable in a regular freezer for 6 months and 30 days in a fridge. It requires a second dose at 28 days (+ or - 5 days). Public Health anticipates receiving two cartons in the first week of January, each containing 1,200 does per carton.

National Priorities from National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI): initial doses should be administered to residents and staff of congregate living settings that provide care to seniors (long-term care, personal care homes, assisted living facilities, community care homes) aged 70 and older beginning with adults aged 80 and over (decreasing by 5-year increments as supply becomes available); health care workers and support workers who have direct contact with patients; adults in indigenous communities.

NL Provincial Priorities: initial doses will be administered to residents and staff of congregate living settings that provide care to seniors; health care workers at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 and those involved in the pandemic response; those living in indigenous communities; those at an advanced age (e.g. at least 85 or possibly 80 depending on uptake).

Because the initial shipment of vaccines must be kept at the HSC site and administered there, the first shipment will go to those who can receive it at that site. It will be focused on health care workers at high risk of exposure or directly involved in the pandemic response. All priority groups are on equal footing in terms of receiving vaccine but with the logistics of not being able to re-distribute/transport the vaccine at this time, public health will initially focus on the groups who can receive it at the HSC. Once more info is received from Pfizer about redistribution, Public Health may start to expand vaccine administration to other sites.

The province expects to have ultralow temperature freezers across the province by January, which will allow vaccine distribution to people in other jurisdictions.

The vaccine will be administered by Public Health and Occupational Health. If the vaccines can be widely distributed and stored at 2 to 8 degrees Celsius in the months ahead, pharmacists and physicians may be asked to help administer the vaccine. They may also be asked to help administer if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 and Public Health needs capacity in order to respond to contact tracing.

Vaccinations will be voluntary. A public campaign will be planned to promote vaccine uptake.

Public Health hopes to be able to vaccinate nearly all the population in the next 8-9 months.

A record of individuals who received the vaccine will be maintained in the Electronic Medical Record and those in long-term care will be recorded in Meditech. The Department of Health is exploring options that will allow citizens to log into their own profile online and download their vaccination record. Another option under consideration is issuing a "proof of vaccination" document.

Receiving the Vaccine

Due to current distribution limitations, the first doses will be administered at the Health Sciences Centre by appointment only to 975 health-care workers at high risk of exposure to COVID-19, and those who are directly involved in the pandemic response.

Vaccinations started today (Thursday, December 17, 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.) and will run through the week of Monday, December 21.

Initial priority clinical areas (**including physicians and medical residents**) include:

- Staff in Long-Term Care
- Public Health
- Emergency Department staff at Health Sciences Centre, St. Clare's, Janeway and Waterford
- Adult Critical Care Units, HSC
- MSICU, CVICU, CCU, HSC
- ICU, St. Clare's
- Children's Critical Care – PICU, NICU
- Case Room
- Paramedicine in St. John's
- COVID Drive Through Unit & Assessment Unit
- Occupational Health
- Inpatient COVID Units
- Infection Prevention and Control
- Individuals in support departments including diagnostic imaging, blood collection
- Support staff (porters, environmental services) who go into these units daily to work

Those who meet the initial criteria to receive the vaccine are asked to call to book an appointment on a first come first serve basis. If you are not in the priority groups please do not call to make an appointment at this time. Please do not show up for a vaccine without first making an appointment.

To book an appointment, please call (709) 777-9070 between 8:30 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. Please leave a voicemail with your name, program area and employee and/or MCP number if no one is available at that time to take your call.

In addition to the phone line, individuals can email covid19.inquiries@easternhealth.ca to book an appointment. They will respond to emails on a first come, first serve basis. Please provide your name, phone number and area where you work in the email. A booking clerk will contact you within 24 hours upon receipt of your email.

About 359 people can be vaccinated per day at present. Public Health protocols will be observed during vaccine administration. Staff administering the vaccine have received special training. A taskforce is in place to roll out vaccine administration across the province.

This is an evolving situation. Information the NLMA receives is fluid and changing everyday. We will keep you updated as new information becomes available to us.

More information can be found in the Eastern Health Memos below:

- [December 16, 2020: COVID-19 Staff and Physician Vaccinations](#)
- [Telephone line for COVID-19 Staff and Physician Vaccinations](#)