



**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR  
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

**February 12, 2020**

**COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Information**

The NLMA has received questions about the current vaccination program and where physicians fit in the rollout of Phase One. The following information is compiled from advice received by Public Health and Eastern Health:

**Vaccine Program**

Newfoundland and Labrador's COVID-19 immunization program is following the recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunizations (NACI) on the prioritization and use of COVID-19 vaccines. NACI has developed detailed guidance on the prioritization of initial doses of vaccine.

**Priority Groups in NL**

Vaccine doses for the whole population will not arrive at the same time. Therefore, a phased approach has been implemented for administering vaccines, starting with those most at risk of exposure to COVID-19, those most likely to experience severe complications due to COVID-19 infection, and those essential to maintaining the provincial pandemic response.

The COVID-19 Immunization Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador identifies three phases for COVID-19 vaccinations. The province is currently in Phase One, which will likely extend until approximately the end of March 2021 provided anticipated vaccine supply.

**Phase One**

In keeping with recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), the ethics consult completed in December and the supply of COVID-19 vaccine in Newfoundland and Labrador, Phase One is prioritized for the following groups:

- Health care workers at high risk of exposure to COVID-19, and those who are directly involved in the pandemic response;
- Congregate living settings for seniors;
- Advanced age; and
- Adults in remote or isolated Indigenous communities.

Health care workers are prioritized in order to maintain workforce stability, preserve health care capacity, and limit spread of COVID-19 infection in health care settings. The staff prioritized for vaccination in the initial vaccine allocation are those who are most likely to come into contact with an individual infected with COVID-19 and transmit to high-risk individuals, or are essential to maintaining the provincial COVID-19 response, such as those administering COVID-19 testing and providing COVID-19 immunizations. Other health care workers will be prioritized as more vaccine supply becomes available.

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

- COVID-19 testing and assessment units;
- Inpatient COVID units
- COVID-19 immunization programs
- Emergency departments
- Critical care units (CCU, ICU, MSICU, CVICU, etc.)
  
- Labour and delivery rooms (case rooms)
- Staff in long-term care
- Paramedicine
- Public Health
- Occupational Health
  
- Infection Prevention and Control
- Individuals in support departments including diagnostic imaging, blood collection
- Support staff (porters, environmental services) who work in the units listed above

Many health care providers in this priority list are still waiting for an initial vaccine, while others are waiting for their second dose. NLMA has been advised that physicians in this priority list will continue to be vaccinated as supply becomes available. The vaccine program is presently distributing vaccines to residents in long-term care and personal care homes in the rural Avalon and Metro region. Safety protocols, including point-of-care risk assessments and PPE requirements remain in effect regardless of vaccine status.

In Phase One, sequencing of the above groups is dependent on logistics, including limitations on transportation, storage and handling requirements, and availability of vaccines. Every effort will be made to prioritize immunization for individuals in the priority groups first, while preventing wastage. However, due to vaccine shortage, transportation and restrictive storage and handling requirements, there is a risk of dose wastage if excess doses remain after completing immunization in a particular setting. In the event that excess doses cannot be provided in time to a member of the priority group in Phase One, the vaccine may be provided to individuals outside of those identified in Phase One target groups.

## **Phase Two**

Additional priority groups will be identified for immunization once most of the individuals in Phase One have been immunized and additional vaccine supply becomes available. Phase One is expected to be completed by the end of March 2021 provided anticipated vaccine supply. In keeping with recommendations from NACI, these include:

- Physicians and residents not included in Phase One
- Health care workers not included in Phase One
- Residents and staff of all other congregate living settings; and
- Essential workers.

During Phase Two, vaccine supply, distribution and storage limitations are initially expected to be similar to what has been experienced in Phase One.

### **Phase Three**

Once most individuals in high-risk priority groups have been immunized, the vaccine will be offered to the general public. It is anticipated that enough vaccines will be available to vaccinate everyone by fall 2021.

During Phase Three, it is expected that a large volume of several different vaccines will be available without the limitations of Phase One and Two.

Public health measures including wearing a mask, physical distancing, handwashing in addition to the recommendations from Occupational Health and Safety for health care and other workers on appropriate precautions and Personal Protective Equipment will continue to be a mainstay in reducing risk regardless of vaccination status.

Until the vaccine has been widely implemented across the province and demonstrated to have been effective in controlling disease transmission, public health measures will be the primary means of protection of individuals who may be at risk of exposure.

### **Physician Administration of the vaccine**

NLMA has been advised that due to the current limited number of vaccines available, the stringent specifications on vaccine storage and distribution, and the initial priority groups for vaccination, the vaccination program is not yet in a position to engage with the NLMA regarding the utilization of physicians for the COVID-19 vaccination program. However, it is anticipated that the program may be in a position for physicians to provide vaccinations to patients in Phase Three.

Given the changing nature of the vaccine type and supply in Canada and world-wide, the program is unable to identify a specific date for which physicians could begin delivering vaccinations to patients at this time. The program will consult with the NLMA for further discussion as plans solidify and more information becomes available.