

To: Nova Scotia Health Care Practitioners and Immunizers

From: Dr. Shelley Deeks, Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Health

Date: February 1, 2023

Re: ***COVID-19 Vaccine update***

On January 20, 2023, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) published [Guidance on COVID-19 vaccine boosters: Initial considerations for 2023](#). This statement reinforces existing recommendations for COVID-19 vaccines related to the primary series and booster doses, including the 2022 fall dose recommendations, noting that many people in Canada have not received currently recommended doses. Nova Scotia's COVID-19 vaccine program is closely aligned with NACI guidance, and no program changes are recommended at this time.

Nova Scotia began offering the fall dose on September 19, 2022, and a bivalent vaccine has been available for the entire duration of the fall dose program. In response to NACI's newly published guidance, eligibility for COVID-19 vaccine will continue so that a single booster dose will be available for those who have not yet received it since the beginning of the fall dose program. For individuals who have received a booster dose since September 19, 2022, *no additional doses are recommended at this time*. The primary vaccines available for booster doses are bivalent mRNA vaccines. CANImmunize is working on a process that will restrict individuals who have received a fall dose since September 19, 2022, from booking any further doses at this time.

To reiterate current eligibility, anyone aged 12 years and older who has completed their primary series, regardless of the number of booster doses previously received, were eligible, starting September 19, 2022, to receive a fall dose provided the minimum interval since last vaccination has passed (168 days for most; 120 days for certain high-risk groups). Individuals previously infected with SARS-CoV-2 are also recommended to wait the minimum interval since last infection (168 days for most; 120 days for certain high-risk groups).

[Table 1 of the NACI Statement](#) provides a summary of current mRNA COVID-19 vaccination recommendations by age group which can be used by providers to encourage uptake of both primary series and booster doses in recommended groups.

Of note:

- All individuals aged 5 and older *should* be offered a COVID-19 vaccine primary series. Children aged 6 months to less than 5 years *may* be offered a COVID-19 vaccine primary series. All persons in Nova Scotia 6 months of age and over continue to remain eligible for their primary series.

- A booster dose since the start of fall 2022 *should* be offered to all individuals aged 5 years and older who are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (including those aged 65 years and older), if not already received.
- For adults aged 18 to 64 years who are *not* at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, at least one booster dose *should* be offered. Therefore, a booster dose *should* be offered to anyone in this group who has not yet received any booster doses. All other individuals aged 5 and older who are *not* at risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (including those aged 18 to 64 years who have already received at least one booster) *may* be offered a booster dose since the start of fall 2022, if not already received and they are eligible for this dose within Nova Scotia.
- It is unclear if or when the need for additional COVID-19 vaccine boosters will arise, or to whom future booster doses will be offered if they are needed. NACI will continue to monitor the evidence, including SARS-CoV-2 epidemiology and duration of vaccine protection, particularly with regard to severe outcomes, in the coming months to provide recommendations on the timing of subsequent booster doses if warranted.

Providers are encouraged to discuss COVID-19 immunization, following the [principles of effective communication](#), with individuals under their care. Respectful, client-centred, open, and clear communication from health care providers can have an important impact on a person's decision to be vaccinated.

For more information on COVID-19 vaccination, please see [Nova Scotia COVID-19 Vaccine Program: Information for Health Care Professionals](#), [COVID-19 vaccine: Canadian Immunization Guide](#), and [NACI statements and publications](#).

Thank you to all who continue to support the ongoing success of Nova Scotia's COVID-19 vaccine program.