

Overview: Canada's COVID-19 Vaccine Planning, Rollout & Safety Considerations



Building on FHCP's prior information-sharing and guidance for members regarding Canada's COVID-19 response, recovery, and resilience, this document shares key information around Canada's immunization plan and rollout priorities for early quantities of approved vaccines. Information has been compiled from various government guidance, including the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and province specific communications.

FHCP is providing this material for information purposes only. As the COVID-19 situation is evolving rapidly, updates and additional information may be issued as and when appropriate.

This document does not constitute legal or professional advice, and businesses should consult government and health authority resources (see Appendix), as well as their own legal or professional advisors to ensure that their activities comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

Immunization Plan

Canada’s immunization response to COVID-19 is a result of collaboration between the Government of Canada, provinces, territories, Indigenous community leaders, municipal governments, public health authorities, manufacturers and logistical experts. The nation’s COVID-19 immunization plan is rooted in core principles of evidence-based decision making, transparency, coherence and adaptability, fairness and equity, public involvement and consistent reporting.

The federal government is responsible for reviewing scientific evidence regarding the safety and efficacy of vaccines, authorizing their use and procuring vaccinations on behalf of all jurisdictions. Provincial and territorial governments determine the policy and process for the storage, distribution and administration of vaccines to the populations they serve, including the sequencing of initial and subsequent doses of vaccines.

Due to the exceptional circumstances and recognition of the urgent need for COVID-19 treatments, Health Canada has approved interim measures to provide more flexibility to expedite the review and authorization of drugs and vaccines for COVID-19. These interim measures allow Health Canada to receive and review information as it becomes available from the manufacturer, which helps to reduce review times. It’s important to note that Health Canada reviews all of the data necessary to determine if a vaccine is safe and effective, and will actively monitor ongoing safety and effectiveness.

Vaccine Rollout

The Canadian government has secured sufficient quantities of vaccines to provide all Canadians with access to vaccinations. The Canadian government has stated that a phased vaccination rollout will be deployed due to limited initial availability of vaccines, with initial quantities of approved vaccines expected to arrive into Canada between December 2020 and March 2021. The Canadian government is targeting to have immunization completed for all Canadians by the end of September 2021. According to experts, immunization can only have an impact on mitigating, and eventually preventing the spread of COVID-19 if enough of the population chooses to get vaccinated. Canadians must be confident in the safety and efficacy of the vaccines, and understand decisions made around priority populations and sequencing.

In consultation with the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and other expert input, priority consideration for immunization is being given to the high risk population, which includes the health vulnerable and exposure vulnerable: the elderly, residents and staff of congregate living arrangements such as long term care facilities, front-line health care workers and those living in conditions with elevated risk for infection or disproportionate consequences, including Indigenous communities.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has shared the following guidance around populations prioritization for early COVID-19 vaccination:

- Residents and staff of shared living settings that provide care for seniors.
- Adults 70 years of age and older, with order of priority:
 - beginning with adults 80 years of age and older
 - decreasing the age limit by 5-year increments to age 70 years as supply becomes available
- Health care workers who have direct contact with patients, including:
 - those who work in health care settings
 - personal support workers
- Adults in Indigenous communities

As additional COVID-19 vaccine(s) and supplies become available, the following populations should be offered vaccinations:

- Health care workers not included in the initial rollout.
- Residents and staff of all other shared living settings, such as:
 - homeless shelters
 - correctional facilities
 - housing for migrant workers
- Essential workers who face additional risks to maintain services for the functioning of society*

**Employees in the food, health and consumer products manufacturing sector are considered as essential workers and part of Canada’s critical infrastructure.*

A number of provinces have shared details regarding the key populations who will be first to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. These lists have been developed through the recommendations of NACI as well as provincial advisory committees and largely follow the two-phase approach recommended by NACI.

Immunization Safety Considerations

Businesses are encouraged to take appropriate steps to address concerns and questions from employees to help them understand the importance of vaccines and prevent the flow of misinformation. Vaccination is a personal choice, and employers should assist their employees in making an informed decision by directing them to resources provided by Health Canada and PHAC.

Should businesses wish to provide information to their employees regarding COVID-19 vaccines, any messaging or materials should be developed with input from human resources and legal support to minimize any potential legal risk. To the extent possible, information provided by businesses to their employees should be consistent with information published by government and experts.

Like any medication or supplement, vaccines can cause side effects and reactions. Side effects which followed vaccine administration in clinical trials for COVID-19 were mild or moderate, similar to what may be expected from other vaccines, and can last a few hours or days after vaccination. According to publicly-available information, common side effects associated with COVID-19 vaccines can include include pain at the site of injection, body chills, feeling tired and feeling feverish. As with all vaccines, there is a rare chance of a more serious side effect, which could include an allergic reaction.

Individuals with a history of serious allergic reaction are encouraged to review the ingredients in the vaccine to understand if there is any risk of allergy to a particular ingredient and should consult a medical professional prior to being vaccinated. The experience of a single reaction to a vaccine that required epinephrine, such as from an EpiPen or other auto-injector, constitutes a history of serious allergic reaction (see Appendix for more information).

Health Canada completes rigorous reviews of the available medical evidence from clinical trials to assess safety risks of approved vaccines. A vaccine will not be approved for use if major safety concerns have been noted.

As a result of the phased approach to immunization, and because it will take time to build immunity within the population, public health and safety measures will continue to be essential to minimize the spread of the virus until extensive immunization is received. Key elements for safety include:

- **Physical distancing (limiting close contact with others)**
- **Personal and surface hygiene (ensure hands and objects are clean)**
- **Physical environment (steps taken to reduce risk such as protective barriers and foot traffic flow patterns)**
- **Appropriate use of PPE**

FHCP has previously shared [Operation Best Practices](#) and [Pandemic Preparedness](#) guidance for industry. Additional information resources from Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada are provided in the Appendix.

As stated previously, businesses should seek appropriate professional and legal input when developing any COVID-19-related policies or employee messaging.

Appendix

- [Canada's COVID-19 Immunization Plan: Saving Lives and Livelihoods](#)
- [PHAC – Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [NACI guidance on prioritization of initial doses of COVID-19 vaccine\(s\)](#)
- [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine: what you should know](#)
- [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine: Health Canada recommendations for people with serious allergies](#)
- [Moderna COVID-19 vaccine: What you should know](#)