

**To:** Nova Scotia Health Care Practitioners and Immunizers

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

**Date:** March 18, 2024

**Re:** *Spring COVID-19 vaccine dose for individuals at highest risk*

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On January 12, 2024, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) published [Guidance on an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccines in the spring for individuals at high risk of severe illness due to COVID-19](#). Given the uncertainty of COVID-19 epidemiology and duration of protection from COVID-19 vaccines, these recommendations were deemed by NACI as discretionary and directed to those most at risk of severe disease.

Nova Scotia is accepting the recommendations and has updated guidance for the COVID-19 vaccine program such that:

From March 25 to May 31, 2024, an additional dose of XBB.1.5 vaccine will be available as part of a targeted high-risk spring vaccination program for persons at greatest risk of severe disease:

- Adults 65 years and older, noting the risk is highest in adults 80 years and older
- Adult residents (18 years and older) of long-term care homes and other congregate living settings for seniors.
- Individuals 6 months and older who are [moderately to severely immunocompromised \(due to underlying condition or treatment\)](#).
- Adults aged 50 years and older who identify as African Nova Scotian, African, African Canadian, Black, African Caribbean, or Mixed Ancestry.
- Adults aged 50 years and older who identify as First Nations.

The recommended interval between a COVID-19 vaccine dose after a known COVID-19 infection or a previous dose of vaccine is 6 months, but individuals may receive a dose after three months have elapsed (i.e., minimum interval). A longer interval is associated with more sustained protection following subsequent doses.

Individuals who have not received previously recommended doses (primary series or booster dose, including a booster since the fall of 2023) continue to be eligible to receive missed doses.

Individuals who are not eligible for the spring booster but have received a dose of COVID-19 vaccine since October 6, 2023, are considered up to date with COVID-19 vaccination at this time.

When discussing COVID-19 vaccine with your patients, health care providers can consider the following:

- Those 80 years and older continue to be at the highest risk of a severe outcome and are less likely to have experienced previous SARS-CoV-2 infection compared to other age groups.
- Waning of protection from vaccination occurs most rapidly in older age groups however the duration of protection following booster doses is unknown.
- Hybrid immunity results from at least one exposure to SARS-CoV-2 infection and COVID-19 vaccine and may provide superior protection against disease, including higher and longer lasting protective antibody levels. The greatest impact of booster vaccination may be among those who have not previously been infected with SARS-CoV-2.
- A number of older adults in Nova Scotia have no previous history of SARS-CoV-2 infection and therefore do not have the benefits of hybrid immunity.

Thank you to all providers for your ongoing contributions to vaccination programs in Nova Scotia.