



Media Lines

Guidance on Continuing Immunization Programs during COVID-19

Issue: The Public Health Agency of Canada, in consultation with the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and the Canadian Immunization Committee, has developed interim guidance on continuing immunization programs during COVID-19.

In light of health considerations and strains on the healthcare system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some provinces and territories have already updated guidance for continuity, prioritization and safe delivery of vaccination services. These provinces and territories have adjusted their vaccination services to prioritize groups such as infants and young children, high-risk individuals, special populations, and individuals requiring post-exposure prophylaxis.

The following high-level messages have been developed in anticipation of media questions on the Government of Canada's guidance for non-COVID-19 immunization programs during the pandemic.

Key messages:

- The COVID-19 pandemic reminds us of the crucial role that vaccines have in creating immunity—particularly for infants and toddlers. Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), in consultation with the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and the Canadian Immunization Committee, has released interim guidance on continuing immunization programs during COVID-19.
- Keeping our vaccinations up to date is an important way Canadians can help protect themselves and vulnerable people, as well as help reduce the burden on Canada's healthcare system during this unprecedented time.
- Delaying vaccines against serious diseases could leave your child, your family and people with weakened immune systems at risk of catching other serious diseases.
- We anticipate there could be a decrease in vaccination coverage due to vaccine providers responding to COVID-19 activities and the temporary closure of primary care offices to facilitate physical distancing.
- We know that keeping up to date with vaccines may not be possible for everyone given the current circumstances. However, we are asking Canadians to do their best to keep their vaccines up to date and to seek out open vaccination clinics.
- Canadians should consult with their healthcare provider to determine when they should visit, and learn about the measures that they have put in place to safely deliver vaccination services during COVID-19.



- Symptomatic individuals and those with suspected, probable or confirmed COVID-19, as well as people who are close contacts of a case, should not attend scheduled immunization appointments during their period of isolation.
- PHAC advises vaccine providers that if capacity is not sufficient to maintain all routine programs, emphasis should be put on the primary series and booster doses for children aged less than two years.
- A careful assessment of missed doses will be important to ensure that the pandemic does not leave a long-lasting immunization gap in any Canadian communities.
- PHAC's guidance on immunization programs during COVID-19 should be read in conjunction with current provincial and territorial policies on immunization during the pandemic.

Messages on additional public health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during immunization appointments:

- Given the current pandemic, it is normal to feel concerned about visiting a doctor's office or clinic for routine appointments such as vaccinations.
- Canadians should consult with their healthcare provider to:
 - find out whether there have been any revisions to their or their family's recommended vaccination schedule as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - determine when they should visit; and
 - learn about the measures that have been put in place to safely deliver vaccination services during COVID-19.
- As the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, vaccine providers should follow advice from their provincial and territorial governments and PHAC on when to relax physical distancing measures and other precautions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.