

COVID-19 Immunization for Preferred Candidates, Employees and On-Site Medical Staff

Frequently Asked Questions

REVISED: November 22, 2023

On May 23, 2023, Nova Scotia Health implemented a revised COVID-19 policy entitled [COVID-19 Immunization for Preferred Candidates, Employees, and On-Site Medical Staff](#). The updated policy is an interim step toward a future state where COVID-19 is present in our society with predictable patterns, also known as an endemic state. This policy will continue to be reviewed and updated accordingly to reflect the current research, guidance, and provincial/federal recommendations around COVID-19 and vaccinations.

The revised policy will maintain current COVID-19 vaccination requirements and will continue to permit exceptions for those who are unable to be immunized for medical reasons or for other grounds protected under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

The following are answers to some of the frequently asked questions about the revised policy.

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Revised Immunization Policy

What is new in the May 23, 2023 policy revision?

The province of Nova Scotia has discontinued the COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination Protocol in High-Risk Settings and now requires employers to develop their own COVID-19 vaccination policies. The Nova Scotia Health policy has been updated to reflect the latest evidence around the benefits of hybrid immunity.

What does this mean?

All employees (including employees who work from home), and on-site medical staff are still required to complete COVID-19 primary series vaccination and submit proof of immunization to Occupational Health Safety and Wellness. The revised policy continues to strongly recommend that all employees and on-site medical staff receive all future recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses/boosters beyond the primary series and report any vaccinations to OHSW as part of your Occupational Health vaccination record.

Why is COVID-19 vaccination still required for Nova Scotia Health employees and on-site medical staff?

Nova Scotia Health is a high-risk setting because of the patient populations we serve. That's why the COVID-19 vaccination requirements for our team members are different than the public health recommendations for the general population. Data continues to demonstrate that primary series of COVID-19 vaccine is highly effective in preventing severe disease, hospitalization, and death.

What is the benefit of hybrid immunity and how does it contribute to organizational protection?

Hybrid immunity occurs when an individual has primary series COVID-19 vaccine and previous natural infection. This protection increases with booster doses. Review of the current evidence shows that the best protection against COVID-19 infection and re-infection is from hybrid immunity.

What is the goal of this policy?

The goal of this policy is to protect the safety of Nova Scotia Health team members, patients, learners, visitors, and essential care partners by mitigating the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Who is covered under the revised policy?

This policy applies to all Nova Scotia Health employees and on-site medical staff. Volunteers, student learners, outside service providers, and contractors, vendors and suppliers refer to separate guidance documents.

Is this Nova Scotia Health's final COVID-19 vaccination policy?

No. While this policy is based on the current evidence available, the policy will continue to be reviewed and updated as needed, even beyond the regular Nova Scotia Health policy revision schedule. Further assessment of the changing body of evidence as well as recommendations by expert bodies (e.g., National Advisory Committee on Immunization) will be considered and re-evaluated in anticipation of the next respiratory season.

Why do I need to report to my employer if I have a COVID-19 infection?

It is important to report your COVID-19 infection to OHSW in order to understand the organizational protection rates for COVID-19 vaccine, natural infection, and hybrid immunity.

If you have a COVID-19 infection, you should report it through the [COVID-19 Status/Reason for Work Absence Webform](#). If you miss more than 37.5 consecutive hours of work (pro-rated to designation) due to a COVID-19 infection, you should also complete the [Self-Application for Sick Leave Webform](#) to apply for sick leave benefits.

Is there any change to those employees and on-site medical staff who are currently on an unpaid administrative leave for not being immunized against COVID-19?

No. Employees who chose not to be immunized under the previous policy, and are currently on an unpaid administrative leave, will remain on unpaid administrative leave until further notice or until they comply with the policy.

On-site medical staff who chose not to be immunized under the previous policy, and currently have their facility-based privileges suspended, will continue to have their facility-based privileges suspended until further notice or until they comply with the policy.

I am currently on an approved leave of absence not related to the COVID-19 immunization policy (e.g., medical, parental, long-term disability leave). Is there any change to when I'm required to be immunized or show proof of my COVID-19 immunization status?

No. Employees and on-site medical staff on an approved leave of absence are encouraged to report their COVID-19 immunization status to OHSW as soon as possible. Those set to return to work are required to have primary series COVID-19 immunization and provide evidence of their immunization status to OHSW at least two weeks (14 days) before their anticipated date of return.

Does the revised policy still provide an exception process for those who cannot be immunized due to medical reasons?

Yes. The revised policy still allows for an exception for those who are unable to be immunized for medical reasons. Medical reasons to qualify for an exception will continue to only be granted for the limited accepted circumstances. See [Exceptions](#) section below for information on how to apply for a medical exception.

Immunosuppression, auto-immune disorders, pregnancy, and breastfeeding are not medical reasons that prevent people from getting COVID-19 vaccine.

Are there any changes to those who received an approved medical or human rights exception for COVID-19 immunization under the previous policy?

No. Any employee or on-site medical staff who had an approved exception will remain in the workplace under their approved precautions. These precautions include, but are not limited to:

- Wearing a medical mask and eye protection at all times while working within a Nova Scotia Health facility, except when alone in an office or breakroom.
- Any other precaution required by Occupational Health, Safety and Wellness.

Proof of Immunization

How do I get my proof of immunization?

Anyone who got a dose of COVID-19 vaccine in Nova Scotia can access their proof of immunization online at <https://novascotia.flow.canimmunize.ca/en/portal> or by calling (toll-free) 1-833-797-7772.

If you received your immunization before CANImmunize was available, you will need to provide the phone number linked to your health card to access your records. If the phone number is no longer valid, you MUST call 1-833-797-7772 to register an email address.

My proof of immunization has an error/missing information. How do I get this fixed?

If your proof of immunization has an error, is missing information or you can't access the record online using your Canadian health card number and the email address or phone number you used to book your appointment, call 1-833-797-7772 (Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.) to report an issue with your vaccine receipt.

When calling to report an issue with your vaccine receipt, you may need to provide your:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Email address or phone number you used to book your appointment
- Health card number
- Type, date, and location of COVID-19 vaccine you received (for each dose)

After you report an issue, it should take two weeks to get a new digital copy of your vaccine receipt. The email is sent from noreply@canimmunize.ca. It can take longer if more information is needed.

I received a vaccine outside of Nova Scotia. How do I get it added to my Nova Scotia COVID-19 immunization record?

Permanent residents of Nova Scotia who received primary series COVID-19 vaccine in another province, territory or country can have their out-of-province immunization included on their Nova Scotia COVID-19 proof of immunization. You need to [upload](#) proof that you received the COVID-19 vaccine, including the date, location, type, brand, and lot number of COVID-19 vaccine you received.

Documentation must be issued by the government or the organization that administered the vaccine and show the name of the issuing government or the name and civic address of the organization that administered the vaccine. It will take two to three weeks to update your Nova Scotia COVID-19 Proof of Vaccination. It can take longer if more information is needed.

People who are not permanent residents of Nova Scotia but received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine in the province can also have their out-of-province immunizations included on their Nova Scotia COVID-19 proof of immunization.

What is the COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Web Form used for?

Use the [Nova Scotia Health COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Webform](#) to:

- Reporting your primary series COVID-19 vaccine and uploading proof of immunization
- Requesting a medical or human rights exception to the primary series COVID-19 vaccine
- Declining primary series COVID-19 vaccination
- Updating your OHSW vaccination records with any booster doses (beyond the primary series) and uploading proof of immunization

Why do I need to keep my Occupational Health vaccination record up to date?

The information in your Occupational Health vaccination record is used by OHSW to provide accurate return to work guidance if you have a COVID-19 risk factor (e.g., positive household contact).

Please read the instructions carefully and follow the prompts to complete the form.

Note, you will need to complete the form separately for each dose/booster of COVID-19 vaccine you are reporting, selecting your name from the employee/physician lookup each time.

1. Before you start, save your proof of immunization on your computer to upload later.
 - a. Go to [Nova Scotia COVID-19 Proof of Vaccination](#) to receive a link to download your proof of COVID-19 immunization if it was received in Nova Scotia.
2. Go to the [Nova Scotia Health COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Webform](#).
 - a. Use Microsoft Edge as your browser to access this link.
3. Read the description on the first page and click on the “Next Page” button at the bottom right of the page.
4. Review the information on the second page under “Please review prior to submitting your vaccination status”.
5. At the top of the second page, click on the “Employee/Physician Lookup” button.
 - a. Enter your full first and last name and date of birth (YYYY/MM/DD) in the correct fields. **Note the first name field is first.**
 - i. Include the “/” between the dates as noted, e.g., xxxx/xx/xx NOT xxxxxxxx
 - ii. If you are still having difficulty, try:
 - Entering the first few letters of your first name, your full last name, and make sure your date of birth is entered correctly
 - Entering your first, middle and last name and date of birth
 - Entering your first name, middle initial, last name, and date of birth
 - Entering your first name, middle initial followed by a period, last name, and date of birth
 - b. Select your name

- i. If your work location is incorrect, you can still enter your immunization status once you have confirmed your name and date of birth are correct.
6. Select one of the “Immunization Status” options at the bottom of the page. More instructions will appear once you make your selection.
7. Choose your “Date of Vaccination/Medical Exception/or Date of Declination” using the calendar button.
 - a. Make sure to ensure these dates correctly.
8. Upload proof of your vaccination by clicking “Choose File”.
 - c. Find where your file is saved on your computer and click “Open”.
 - d. Then click the “Upload” button to the right.
9. Click on the “Complete Form” button on the bottom right of the page.

What if I can't find my name in the employee/physician lookup?

If you are credentialed/privileged by Medical Affairs, please contact credentialing@nshealth.ca

If you are a Nova Scotia Health employee, please contact covid19policyrequest@nshealth.ca

What if I made a mistake when completing the form? How do I correct it?

If you entered correct dates of your vaccines, but in the wrong order, this will be accepted.

If you entered an incorrect date, please contact covid19policyrequest@nshealth.ca

What if I'm unable to upload my proof of immunization?

When uploading files, you will have to select two buttons. First, click on “Choose File” and then, when you see the file on the screen, click on the “Upload” button to the right.

If your file still doesn't upload correctly, please contact covid19policyrequest@nshealth.ca

Exceptions

How do I get a medical exception?

A medical exception can only be granted by your primary care provider, such as a nurse practitioner or family doctor, if they determine that you qualify based on a very limited and specific list of criteria. Please contact OHSW to provide the Medical Certificate Form to your nurse practitioner or family doctor if you think you may qualify for a medical exception.

I don't have a nurse practitioner or family doctor. How do I request a medical exception?

Preferred candidates, employees and on-site medical staff who do not have a nurse practitioner or family doctor and may qualify for a medical exception can contact OHSW to be referred to an Infectious Disease physician for assessment.

Can I go to the hospital/emergency department to get a medical exception?

No. Do not go to a hospital or emergency department to request a medical exception. They will not/are not able to provide a medical exception.

I went to my doctor and was told I don't qualify. I think I do. What do I do now?

Medical exceptions can only be provided by a nurse practitioner or family doctor after assessment or review of your personal medical history. If your nurse practitioner or doctor determines you do not qualify, you will need to speak with them about their decision.

I have a medical reason to be exempt from immunization which is not part of the list. How do I receive one? Who do I need to speak with?

There are only six reasons why someone qualifies for a medical exception to COVID-19 immunization. An exception will not be provided for any other medical diagnoses.

Will medical exception letters from outside Nova Scotia be accepted?

No. There is a clear process for submitting medical exception requests. Physicians and nurse practitioners in Nova Scotia have been provided with the approved medical exception form and this is the only accepted document.

What is the process for making a medical exception claim?

Preferred candidates, employees and on-site medical staff can request OHSW to provide the Medical Certificate Form to their nurse practitioner or family doctor. After the Medical Certificate Form has been completed, fill out the "I have an approved medical exception from a physician/nurse practitioner" option of the [Nova Scotia Health COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Webform](#), and upload the completed form to apply for a medical exception.

Is requiring me to be immunized against COVID-19 a violation of my human rights?

Requiring immunization for the purposes of health and safety and to control the spread of COVID-19 is not prohibited by the [Nova Scotia Human Rights Act](#). Nova Scotia Health has the responsibility to meet employee human rights obligations by considering requests that meet the criteria for a medical exception or any other protected ground in the Human Rights Act. Every measure put in place to protect Nova Scotians from the spread of COVID-19 aims to strike a balance between the rights of an individual and the need to protect the public from the risks of a deadly disease.

What are the human rights exceptions for receiving the vaccine?

Only grounds of discrimination protected by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act will be considered as per s.5(1)(h) - (v), which includes age; race; colour; religion; creed; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity; gender expression; physical disability or mental disability; an irrational fear of contracting an illness or disease; ethnic, national, or aboriginal origin; family status; marital status; source of income; political belief, affiliation, or activity; or an individual's association with another individual or class of individuals having characteristics referred to in clauses (h) to (u).

The Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission has indicated that some people may not want to be immunized because they do not believe in vaccines as a religious practice. However, not all beliefs are protected under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Only religious beliefs that are sincerely held and connected to a faith are protected under the Act.

Employers may also have to consider other legal obligations to all their employees. Someone who wants to make an exception on the ground of religious beliefs will need to provide information to show it is a facet of their belief that they cannot receive immunizations and that belief is sincerely held and connected to their faith.

What is the process for making a Human Rights exception claim?

Employees and on-site medical staff can request a Human Rights exception by completing the “other/human rights leave of absence decline” section of the [Nova Scotia Health COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Webform](#). Preferred candidates can apply using the [COVID-19 Vaccination Human Rights Exception Application](#).

If I have an approved exception will my role and responsibilities change?

Employees and on-site medical staff with an approved exception will be required to meet additional health and safety requirements such as wearing specific personal protective equipment (PPE), COVID-19 testing, and/or may be reassigned. OHSW will review all policy exceptions and additional employment restrictions may include, but are not limited to, restricting work with immunocompromised patients or those most susceptible to infection and/or at high risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19 infection and related complications.

If I receive an exception and have to wear special personal protective equipment (PPE) or follow a testing regime will my coworkers know my personal health information that I’m not immunized?

Nova Scotia Health has a commitment to keep individual health information confidential. All employees and on-site medical staff at Nova Scotia Health are also subject to [Respectful Workplace - Policy - AD-HR-020](#).

Any employee may be required to don personal protection equipment (PPE) or test for COVID-19 for a variety of reasons unrelated to this policy including, protecting the population they serve or risk of potential exposure. Therefore, it is not fair for anyone to assume that everyone wearing PPE is not immunized.

If I’m approved for a human rights exception, does Nova Scotia Health have an obligation to accommodate me?

Employees or on-site medical staff who receive approval from Nova Scotia Health for an exception for any protected ground under the Human Rights Act will be accommodated in the workplace to the point of undue hardship. Accommodations may include wearing specific PPE, undergoing COVID-19 testing and/or reassignment.

Privacy and Confidentiality

I am concerned about the privacy implications of reporting my immunization status. How will Nova Scotia Health protect my personal information? How will you store and protect my personal health information?

OHSW has created a confidential reporting process. This will allow Nova Scotia Health to determine our current immunization and/or valid exception rates.

Immunization records are personal health information and kept confidential and secure by OHSW. Information communicated by OHSW is disclosed in accordance with applicable policies, law, collective agreements, and employment guides, and is limited to only that which is necessary to inform the employer of any additional restrictions and/or controls required.

Vaccine Safety

I'm afraid of having a severe reaction to the vaccine. How do I know they are safe?

Vaccines approved for use in Canada are [proven to be safe](#) and effective for most people and protect against severe disease, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccines must be approved for use by Health Canada and go through clinical trials and safety checks. Vaccines approved for use in Canada meet strict standards for safety, quality, and effectiveness.

Serious adverse reactions are **rare**, but they do happen. If you have concerns about serious allergies or health conditions, you should speak with your health care provider.

What leave is available if I have an adverse reaction to the COVID-19 immunization?

As with any illness, supports are available for employees who experience an adverse reaction following immunization. Employees who experience an adverse event following immunization (AEFI) and are unable to report to work must follow their collective agreement/employment guide as it pertains to personal sick leave.

General Questions

I don't work directly with patients/residents/clients, why do I need to be immunized?

In order to protect the health and safety of the population we serve and each other, the policy applies to all employees and on-site medical staff, regardless of their work environment or the type of work they do.

Is there an exception for those who work from home?

No. There are no exceptions for those who work from home. All employees and on-site medical staff at Nova Scotia Health, including those who work at home, may be required to report to Nova Scotia Health property at any time.

What is the definition of primary series?

Immunization with a World Health Organization approved COVID-19 vaccine, with a completion of at least:

- Both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine that requires two doses to complete the primary Immunization series (e.g., Moderna Spikevax™, Pfizer-BioNTech Comiraty™, AstraZeneca Vaxzevria™, Novavax Nuvaovid™), or
- One dose of a COVID-19 vaccine that only requires one dose to complete the primary Immunization series (e.g., Pfizer Comirnaty® Omicron XBB.1.5, Moderna Spikevax® XBB.1.5, Janssen Johnson & Johnson)

If I've already had COVID-19, and have recovered, do I still need to get immunized?

Yes. Employees and on-site medical staff must be immunized regardless of whether they have already had COVID-19. If you have already recovered from COVID-19, there is still a chance you could contract COVID-19 again or spread it to others.

Hybrid immunity refers to the immunity acquired through both COVID-19 vaccination and COVID-19 infection. Hybrid immunity has been shown to provide better protection than immunity due to infection or vaccination alone and is improved even more with booster doses. Therefore, vaccination remains important even if you have had prior COVID-19 infection.

How do I schedule, reschedule, or cancel a COVID-19 immunization appointment?

You can schedule or make changes to your appointment online at novascotia.ca/vaccination using your Nova Scotia health card.

Additional Resources

We continue to have resources and protocols in place to support you in your work. Continue to follow COVID-19 safety protocols including staff self-screening, and pre-screening and Point of Care Risk Assessment for clients. Continue to practice good hand hygiene, universal masking, and use of personal protective equipment as recommended.

If you have health-related questions, please contact your primary care provider.

- [Nova Scotia Coronavirus website](#)
- [Nova Scotia Health COVID-19 Hub](#)
- [Nova Scotia COVID-19 Proof of Vaccination](#)
- [Nova Scotia Human Rights Act](#)