

# **National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) Issues Interim Guidance on Continuity of Immunization Programs During COVID-19**

## **Update for York Region health care professionals as of May 20, 2020**

On May 13, 2020, NACI updated its guidance on continuing immunization programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted by NACI, disruption of immunization services, even briefly, will result in an accumulation of susceptible individuals, and a higher likelihood of vaccine-preventable disease (VPD) outbreaks. Outbreaks may result in VPD-related deaths and an increased burden on the health care system and its partners, on top of the additional pressures caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. Please consider the recommendations for your practice set out in the [Interim guidance on continuity of immunization programs during the COVID-19 pandemic guidance](#) provided by NACI and the Public Health Agency of Canada. Highlights of the guidance can be found below.

### **Defer immunizations in symptomatic individuals**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, appropriate precautions must be taken to avoid potential transmission and reduce the risks to health care providers and other patients. Individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 (including minor symptoms), a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19, or who are close contacts of someone with COVID-19, should defer routine immunization until they have recovered.

### **Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for VPDs**

If PEP with vaccine or antibody products is required, it should be given without delay. If PEP is required for an individual with COVID-19 or a close contact of someone with COVID-19, it should be given without delay using appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for the health care provider.

### **Infants and toddlers**

#### **Prioritize primary immunization series for children 2 years of age and under.**

Infants and children should continue to receive their routine vaccines in accordance with [Ontario's Routine Immunization Schedule](#).

### **Children**

The boosters given between 4 and 6 years of age can be deferred, but administration of these immunizations should be prioritized before the child begins school.

### **School-based immunization programs**

York Region Public Health's school-based immunization clinics have been temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of schools. More details on when these clinics will resume and the eligibility for students who have missed this year's clinics will be provided when available. As a reminder, restarting an immunization series is not necessary for routine immunization programs.

### **Adolescent immunizations**

In general, routine adolescent vaccines can be deferred until full health care services are available, and/or when schools reopen.

### **Reminders for Deferred Immunizations**

**PUBLIC HEALTH**

[york.ca/healthprofessionals](http://york.ca/healthprofessionals)



A reminder, recall, or documentation process should be in place to ensure the child, student or adolescent receives the deferred immunizations when full healthcare and/or school resumes.

## **Immunizations during pregnancy**

Prenatal care is still essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many prenatal visits take place in-person. NACI recommends continuing to provide the Tdap vaccine during every pregnancy, ideally between 27 and 32 weeks' gestation. This can be combined with another prenatal visit, but if it's not possible to combine, a unique visit for immunization would be recommended. The influenza vaccine should also be provided during every pregnancy, at any gestational age.

## **Adult and older adult immunizations**

Older adults are at higher risk of severe outcomes of COVID-19 and are at high risk for VPDs such as pneumococcal disease, influenza and herpes zoster. It is preferable to offer immunization when it can be combined with another medical visit, offering multiple vaccines if required, to minimize the risk of acquiring COVID-19 and reducing the number of health care encounters. Consider the local COVID-19 epidemiology and transmission risk when deciding if an older adult should visit only for an immunization. You can get the latest information on cases of COVID-19 in York Region at [york.ca/covid19](http://york.ca/covid19).

## **Special populations**

Individuals who are immunocompromised and/or with chronic conditions are at higher risk of severe outcomes of COVID-19. Vulnerable populations should not make medical visits solely for the purpose of immunization in areas where community transmission of COVID-19 is ongoing. If possible, offer immunizations when it can be combined with another medical visit. These populations remain a priority for immunization against VPDs.

## **Immunization of workers**

Health care workers are at an increased risk of exposure to VPDs and should continue to be immunized according to recommended schedules.

## **Travellers**

Those who must travel outside of Canada should still be immunized according to recommended schedules, based on the health risks at their destination. This includes PEP following exposure from travel, which remains a high priority for care.

## **For more immunization information**

York Region Public Health will continue to provide health care professionals with the latest information on immunization activities and recommendations as the COVID-19 pandemic progresses and normal services resume.

The Ministry has also released primary care guidance:

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019\\_primary\\_care\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_primary_care_guidance.pdf)

If you have any questions about COVID-19 or immunization, call our dedicated health professional COVID-19 line at **1-877-464-9675 ext. 77280** (8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week, after hours call 905-953-6478). Continue to visit [york.ca/healthprofessionals](http://york.ca/healthprofessionals), [york.ca/covid19](http://york.ca/covid19) and [Ontario.ca/covid19](http://Ontario.ca/covid19) for up to date information on COVID-19.