



# COVID-19 immunization update

COBC recognizes that many of our registrants have important questions about when you will be eligible for a vaccination, or how you can help with BC's [COVID-19 Immunization Plan](#).

We have put together the following information to answer any questions you may have about the plan. This information has been shared with us and other health regulators in BC by the BC Health Regulators group, of which COBC is a member. BCHR are working closely with the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) and her team to help inform the rollout of the plan.

We will continue to share any forthcoming information we receive about vaccine eligibility, or how health professionals can assist with the logistics of the plan.

## Phased COVID-19 Immunization Plan

On January 22, the BC government provided a detailed update on the strategy for the province's evidence-based COVID-19 Immunization Plan. The plan is focused protecting those most at risk of severe disease and death, and eventually stopping the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. This means that as long as there is limited supply of the vaccine, we need to prioritize protecting those most at risk of severe illness and death first.

The evidence indicates that increasing age is by far the most significant factor impacting an individual's risk of severe illness and death. BC's phased approach to immunization reflects this:

- Elderly populations will have the highest priority for vaccination.
- This age-based approach also increases protection for those with clinical risk factors for more severe COVID-19 illness, as the prevalence of these also increases with age.

The plan is based on scientific evidence, as well as expert advice and recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, BC's Immunization Committee and BC's public health leadership committee. The COVID-19 vaccine will be distributed equitably and ethically to people in BC, following [national ethical frameworks](#) and [BCCDC's COVID-19 Ethical Decision-Making Framework](#). It is important to note that details are subject to change based on vaccine supply and emerging public health situations.

### Phases 1-2 (December 2020 to March 2021)

Phases 1 and 2, which are focused on first protecting those most at risk of severe disease and death, include vaccination for **targeted** groups of health professionals – details are in the [BC COVID-19 Immunization Plan](#).

**Phase 1** includes residents and staff of long-term care facilities and residents and staff of assisted living residences. There is provision for health professionals in private practice who are seeing residents in these settings to access vaccination through the relevant facility.



“Community and home support and nurses caring for seniors” are included in phase 1 – at this point, ***the PHO still needs to clarify*** if there will be opportunities for non-nursing staff offering home care services to receive their vaccines in this phase.

**Phase 2** includes GPs and medical specialists, and nurse practitioners (as per Dr. Penny Ballem’s verbal announcement on January 22). The medical specialist term is not subject to broader interpretation – medical specialists are College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC registrants only.

Health professionals in private practice settings are not included in phases 1 or 2.

### Phase 3 (April to June)

Phase 3 includes vaccination of the “extremely clinically vulnerable” as well as the start of age-prioritized immunization of the general population ranging from age 79 to 60. BC’s [COVID-19 Immunization Plan](#) notes that ***once additional vaccines are approved and become available***, people between the ages of 18 and 64 who are “front-line essential workers or work in specific workplaces or industries may be included in the later part of Phase 3.” At this point, the essential worker details have not been worked out.

### Phase 4 (July to September)

Phase 4 focuses on mass vaccination of the general adult population - recipients will be prioritized to receive their vaccinations in descending order from age 59 to 18.

## How can Licensed Opticians assist in the COVID-19 immunization plan?

The provincial strategy for recruiting more vaccine providers from the health colleges is not yet in place. Details are still being determined around the approach to identifying and recruiting additional health professionals to support the province’s immunization plan. This will depend on vaccine supply and the number of vaccinations per week that need to be delivered, as there is already existing capacity. At this point, we do not know if there will be a need to ask retired health professionals to come forward.

We anticipate that if extra capacity is required, health professionals who already have the delivery of injections in their scope of practice would be called upon first. BCHR and the regulatory colleges will be working with the PHO and the Ministry of Health to identify the experience and education that will be required for health professionals interested in becoming vaccine providers. Once prospective vaccine providers have been identified, they will be able to take advantage of online education resources that are already in place with the BCCDC. ([See Education and training for vaccine providers](#))

## How can I stay up to date on the COVID-19 immunization plan?

We will communicate any updates as we know more. The [COVID-19 Immunization Plan \(updated Jan. 22\) on the BC government website](#) provides detailed information about each phase of the plan, including details of when different age groups can expect to be vaccinated. The BCCDC website has a section that provides [information/resources for health professionals, including a question and answer document](#).



## How do I respond if a patient had a question about the COVID-19 immunization and the rollout plan?

According to the BC Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Immunization Plan](#):

*“The COVID-19 vaccine is saving lives. Vaccines do more than protect the people getting vaccinated, they also protect everyone around them. The more people in a community who are immunized and protected from COVID-19, the harder it is for COVID-19 to spread.”*

COBC supports the delivery of safe, evidence-based care. BC's [COVID-19 Immunization Plan](#) is based on scientific evidence, as well as expert advice and recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, BC's Immunization Committee and BC's public health leadership committee. Canada also has [one of the most thorough and stringent systems](#) to approve new vaccines for use in people.

When a patient asks for your advice or opinion on COVID-19 immunization, they see you as a trusted source because of your professional designation and relationship. In keeping with this relationship, we expect you to provide patients with advice that is:

- within your scope of practice,
- in line with provincial public health guidance ,
- grounded in science and best practices.

You can direct your patient to a recommended source for trusted COVID-19 information. In BC this is the [BC Centre for Disease Control \(BCCDC\) website](#). [The Immunize BC website](#) also has FAQs for patients. If more information is needed, or if the patient has medical questions or concerns about COVID-19 immunization in relation to their personal medical condition, these are best answered by their primary health care provider. You may refer them to their physician or nurse practitioner.

## Do I still need to adhere to COVID-19 safety protocols?

All COVID-19 safety protocols to protect you and your clients/patients must remain in place during the rollout of BC's COVID-19 Immunization Plan until the PHO officially communicates that it is safe to ease off or stop any of those measures. You may review the WorkSafe BC Safety Plan if you have any specific concerns. Immunization is an effective way to reduce everyone's risk of infection from COVID-19, and it complements all the other measures/precautions that we need to maintain at this time.