

# Memorandum

To: Health Care Providers

From: Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer of Health

Date: October 6, 2021

Re: Additional doses of COVID-19 vaccine in moderately to severely immunocompromised Nova Scotians following a primary COVID-19 vaccine series

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Immunocompromised individuals are at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has reviewed evidence from recent studies on the effectiveness, immunogenicity and safety of an additional dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in immunocompromised individuals who had previously received a 1- or 2-dose primary COVID-19 vaccine series and have [updated recommendations](#) for this population. Emerging evidence shows that some immunocompromised individuals have a lower vaccine effectiveness and/or immune response to COVID-19 vaccines compared to the general population. Recent studies also show that some individuals who are moderately to severely immunocompromised who did not respond to or who had a reduced immune response after two doses of an mRNA vaccine have an increased immune response after a third dose of an mRNA vaccine. However, the effectiveness of a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine in immunocompromised individuals is not known at this time, and some people may not respond to a third dose. The safety profile of mRNA vaccines in observational studies in this population has been comparable to what has been observed in the general population, with no unexpected or serious safety signals to date, including no worsening of an immunocompromising condition that has been attributed to the vaccine. However, due to the small size of these studies and limited follow-up times, the impact of additional doses on rare adverse events are unknown at this time, this includes the risk of myocarditis and/or pericarditis associated with a third dose of an mRNA vaccine, including when given to immunocompromised individuals. Despite limited evidence, NACI has noted that although waiting for vaccine effectiveness data for this population would increase the certainty of the [updated recommendations](#), an assessment of the benefits and harms given the available evidence on immunogenicity and safety, supports offering an additional dose to this population in order to optimize direct protection from vaccine if possible.

In alignment with NACI's strong recommendations, the following is recommended for Nova Scotians who are moderately to severely immunocompromised and within the authorized age group:

- Individuals meeting the [moderately to severely immunocompromised criteria](#) who have previously received a primary COVID-19 vaccine series (with a homologous or

heterologous schedule using mRNA or viral vector vaccines) are recommended to receive, and are eligible for, an additional dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine at least 28 days following completion of the primary series [(i.e., 2 doses of mRNA and AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine (homologous heterologous series), or 1 dose of Janssen (Johnson & Johnson vaccine)].

- Individuals meeting [moderately to severely immunocompromised criteria](#) who have not yet been immunized with a primary series of COVID-19 vaccine are recommended to receive, and are eligible for, a primary series of three doses of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine at a minimal interval of 28 days between each dose.

To meet eligibility criteria for additional COVID-19 doses, moderately to severely immunocompromised is defined by specific criteria which may be found at:

- <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/documents/third-doses-Covid-19-vaccine-immunocompromise.pdf> (eligibility criteria)
- <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/documents/immunosuppressive-medication-list.pdf> (immunosuppressive medications), and
- <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/documents/primary-immunodeficiency-list.pdf> (primary immunodeficiencies)

Immunization providers are expected to verify that individuals meet criteria for moderate to severe immunocompromise and hence are eligible for an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine. After reviewing the list of primary immunodeficiency conditions, if immunization providers have questions, they may contact Dr. Gina Lacuesta at 902-425-3927 (office) or via the QEII switchboard at 902-473-2220. After reviewing the list of immunosuppressive medications, if providers have questions regarding medication eligibility, they may contact the [Nova Scotia Health COVID-19 Vaccine Pharmacist Consult Service](#) by calling 1-833-768-1151. **The contact information for immunization provider support is not to be given to individuals presenting for immunization.**

Similar to previous doses of COVID-19 vaccine, eligible individuals can book their third dose appointments online or by phone. It is anticipated that appointment bookings for third doses will be available by October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Individuals should indicate they are booking for a third dose. When booking, individuals will be required to indicate that they have reviewed the definition of moderately to severely immunocompromised and that they meet criteria for a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals will be aware that immunization providers will confirm that they meet eligibility criteria and that they should bring a list of their medications and other documentation which they may have (e.g. prescription bottles, insurance notes) which would indicate that they qualify for a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine. When booking their third dose of COVID-19 vaccine, individuals will also be required to indicate that they are aware of the limited evidence regarding additional COVID-19 vaccine doses and that they have had a discussion with their health care provider about the need for an additional dose.