

## Fall Influenza and Covid-19 Vaccination Starts Soon

Dear Physicians & Nurse Practitioners,

Updated influenza and COVID-19 vaccines will soon arrive. We thank you for participating in the influenza vaccine campaign and invite you to consider offering the updated KP.2 strain COVID-19 vaccine to eligible individuals at increased risk of severe disease. Most people will access these vaccines through pharmacies or Island Health clinics following invitations sent through the provincial Get Vaccinated system. Vaccines will also be available directly for patients and staff in long-term care and hospitals, and through Community Health Services and First Nations health providers.

**Influenza vaccine is recommended and provided free for all BC residents  $\geq$  6 months of age.** It is especially important for those at higher risk of severe disease including:

- Age 65 and above
- Residents of long-term care facilities and other congregate living settings
- Age 6 months - 5 years
- Children and adolescents (6 months to 18 years of age) with conditions treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid (ASA)
- People who are pregnant
- Indigenous peoples
- Children and adults 5-64 years of age with underlying health conditions
- Adults with BMI  $\geq$  40, children with weight  $\geq$ 95<sup>th</sup> percentile
- People who interact with influenza-susceptible animals (e.g., poultry, swine, dairy industry workers)

Other priority populations for the influenza vaccine include those who are capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk (e.g., health care workers, household contacts, and visitors to health care facilities), and people who provide essential community services.

**COVID-19 vaccine is recommended and provided free for all BC residents > 6 months of age at increased risk of infection or severe COVID-19 disease including:**

- Age 65 and above
- Residents of long-term care facilities and other congregate living settings
- People with underlying medical conditions
- Individuals 6 months of age and older who are moderately to severely immunosuppressed
- People who are pregnant
- Indigenous peoples age 55 and above
- People who provide essential community services – including health care workers

### ***Participating as a community vaccine provider:***

- Influenza vaccine inventory has started to arrive and will be ready for distribution to primary care providers, long-term care facilities, and assisted living facilities in early October. You will be able to start vaccinating as soon as you have vaccine, but please do not book appointments until you are notified of vaccine availability.
- The provincial fall vaccination campaign will start mid-October, with the first ImmsBC invitations being sent on October 8<sup>th</sup> with appointment availability available from October 15<sup>th</sup>. Invitations will proceed in order, according to priority groups (e.g., health care workers, clinically extremely vulnerable, seniors etc.).

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### Island Health Medical Health Officers

Chief MHO: Dr. Réka Gustafson 250-519-3406; North Island: Dr. Charmaine Enns 250-331-8591

Central Island: 250-739-6304; Cowichan Region: Dr. Stéphane Trépanier 250-737-2020

South Island: Dr. Mike Benusic, Dr. Murray Fyfe, Dr. Dee Hoyano, Dr. Christina Kay 250-519-3406

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- You can order influenza vaccines as per usual, as well as COVID 19 vaccines. Refer to [Immunization Info for Healthcare Professionals](#) for instructions on vaccine ordering, storing, handling, administration, and documentation.
- There are unique aspects of COVID-19 vaccines to consider, including a short shelf-life after first vial puncture and a requirement for all doses to be documented in the Provincial Vaccination Registry (ie: ImmsBC or eForms).
- We will receive shipments of vaccine throughout the season. For your first order, request only the quantity you anticipate needing for the first two weeks based on booked appointments. Subsequent orders can be placed as needed.
- Vaccines need to be picked-up at your [local public health unit](#).

**Supporting patients to get vaccinated:**

- If participating as a community vaccine provider, offer directly to patients as you see fit without patients having to book appointments through the provincial system.
- Otherwise, refer patients to [Learn about Health: Immunizations](#) or their local pharmacy.
- If patients haven't received COVID-19 vaccines previously in BC or didn't receive an influenza vaccine in BC last season, advise them to register in the provincial [Get Vaccinated System](#) or by calling **1-833-838-2323**. They will be sent an invitation to book an appointment, according to their priority group.
- Since influenza is a predictably seasonal infection, patients should receive influenza vaccine as soon as vaccine is available. However, COVID-19 seasonality is not as predictable and vaccine effectiveness begins to wane 3-4 months after infection or immunization. Therefore, COVID-19 vaccine is recommended 6 months after COVID-19 infection or a previous booster dose. An interval as short as 3 months is acceptable.

Publicly funded influenza vaccines available this season:				
Product	Fluzone® Quadrivalent	Flulaval® Tetra	Flumist® Quadrivalent <sup>1</sup>	Fluad® Trivalent, Adjuvanted <sup>3</sup>
Intended use <sup>2</sup>	≥ 6 months of age		2-17 years of age	≥ 65 years of age
Strains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A/Victoria/4897/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus</li> <li>• A/Thailand/8/2022 (H3N2)-like virus (<b>NEW</b> strain this year)</li> <li>• B/Austria/1359417/2021-like virus (B/Victoria lineage)</li> <li>• B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (B/Yamagata lineage) – in quadrivalent vaccines only</li> </ul>			
<p><sup>1</sup>Flumist® is a live, attenuated vaccine, administered as intranasal spray; additional contraindications apply.</p> <p><sup>2</sup><b>Do not miss an immunization opportunity: if an intended product is not available, please use an appropriate alternate product.</b></p> <p><sup>3</sup> Fluad® is an adjuvanted vaccine, associated with increased vaccine efficacy, and preferentially recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) for individuals 65 years of age and older. If this vaccine is not available, any of the age-appropriate influenza vaccines should be offered.</p> <p><u>Reminder:</u> People with severe egg allergy (including anaphylaxis) can be offered any influenza vaccine.</p> <p><u>Timing:</u> Influenza vaccine can be given at the same time as, or any interval from, COVID-19 vaccine or other vaccines. Children &lt;9 years of age receiving influenza vaccine for the first time should be offered two doses.</p>				

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[Island Health's Immunization Information for Healthcare Professionals](#)

[Influenza vaccines for adults 65 years of age and older – question and answer document 2024 \(BCCDC\)](#)

If there are outstanding questions after reviewing the above, please contact your [local public health unit](#):

Campbell River Health Unit	250-850-2110	Port Alberni Health Unit	250-731-1315
Comox Valley Health Unit	250-331-8520	Port Alice Health Unit	250-284-3555
Duncan Health Unit	250-709-3050	Port Hardy Health Unit	250-902-6071
Esquimalt Health Unit	250-519-5311	Port McNeill Health Unit	250-956-4711
Ladysmith Health Unit	250-755-3342	Saanich Health Unit	250-519-5100
Lake Cowichan Health Unit	250-749-6878	Salt Spring Island Health Unit	250-538-4880
Nanaimo Public Health Unit	250-755-3342	Tofino and Ucluelet Public Health Unit	250-725-4020
Parksville Family Place	250-947-8242	Victoria Health Unit	250-388-2200
Peninsula Health Unit	250-544-2400	West Shore Health Unit	250-519-3490

**Update on new Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and pneumococcal vaccines:**

- **RSV** - RSV infection is responsible for severe illness in young children and individuals 65 years and older:
  - **Infants – monoclonal antibodies (mAbs):** We have received a number of questions about Nirsevimab (Beyfortus), the newest mAb requiring one injection, that is preferentially recommended by NACI for all infants. This product is **not yet available in BC**, through the publicly funded or private purchase route. As a reminder, the **BC RSV Immunoprophylaxis program** offers publicly funded palivizumab (Synagis) immunoprophylaxis to children at high risk of hospitalization due to RSV, such as premature infants, those with chronic lung or congenital heart disease, or severe immunodeficiency < 2 years of age.
  - **Pregnancy:** Infants can also be protected via immunization of pregnant people. RSVpreF vaccine (Abrysvo®), which is approved for use in pregnancy from 32-36 weeks gestation (December 2023), has an efficacy of 57% in preventing RSV related hospitalizations in infants up to 6 months. It is available for private purchase. Some private insurance plans may cover the cost of vaccines.
  - **Older adults:** Both RSVpreF (Abrysvo™) and RSPpreF3 (Arexvy) vaccines are approved for use in adults > 60 years. RSV immunization is recommended by NACI for people ≥ 60 years who are residents of long-term care or other chronic care facilities, and all adults ≥ 75 years. Both vaccines have high efficacy against reducing RSV-related hospitalizations. They are available for private purchase at select pharmacies and Travel Clinics. Some private insurance plans may cover the cost of vaccines.
- **Pneumococcal conjugate vaccines** – new vaccines require private purchase:
  - NACI strongly recommends Pneu-C-20 (Pneum-C-20) vaccine for unvaccinated people ≥ 65 years, those 50-64 years at high risk of infection, 18-49 years with immune compromising conditions, children < 18 at high risk of invasive disease, and primary immunization of children < 5 years. Pneu-C-15 (Vaxneuvance) can be used as an alternative for healthy children, and if offered to at-risk adults should be followed by a dose of pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine at a minimum interval of 8 weeks. Adults 65 and older who have previously received pneumococcal immunization can receive Pneum-C-20 (Pneum-C-20) five years from their previous pneumococcal dose. Health Canada also recently approved Pneu-C-21 and NACI recommendations are pending. Pneumococcal conjugate vaccines are available for private purchase at select pharmacies and Travel Clinics. Some private insurance plans may cover the cost of vaccines. A reminder that there are currently 2 publicly funded vaccines that protect against pneumococcal disease in BC:

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- Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV23) is recommended for adults age 65 and older, residents of any age living in long-term care or assisted living facilities, and others at high risk of pneumococcal infection (e.g., asplenia, sickle-cell disease, immunosuppression, diabetes, chronic liver/kidney/heart/lung disease).
- Pneumococcal conjugate (PCV 13) vaccine is given free to infants at 2, 4, and 12 months of age. It's also provided free to older children with certain medical conditions (e.g., asplenia, sickle-cell disease, immunosuppression, diabetes, chronic liver/kidney/heart/lung disease – except asthma\*) and adults with stem cell transplant or HIV.

\*Recommended by NACI for children  $\leq 18$  years) with asthma which required medical assistance in the last 12 months, but not currently publicly funded in BC

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