

Registrar's message: BC's COVID-19 immunization plan



On January 22, 2021, the BC Government shared the strategy for the province's COVID-19 immunization plan. The plan is designed to save lives and stop the spread of COVID-19, which means that as long as there is a limited supply of the vaccine, priority will be given to protecting those who are at increased risk of exposure and serious complications.

British Columbia's four-phase immunization plan is based on expert advice and guidance 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 to BC residents following national ethical frameworks and the BCCDC's COVID-19 Ethical Decision-Making Framework.

As the provincial health officer has stated, timelines for the four phases may change depending on vaccine availability.

We all know that preventive measures such as physical distancing, frequent handwashing, and wearing the right type of mask help to reduce the risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19, but these measures alone are not enough. Ending this pandemic requires all of us to adhere to these measures consistently and according to the PHO's orders and guidance, and most importantly, it requires widespread vaccination.

The BCCDC has developed and published numerous clinical resources for health-care providers about COVID-19, including a recently updated [questions and answers document](#) about BC's immunization plan. One particularly useful [section](#) addresses vaccine hesitancy and guides clinicians to start conversations with patients from a place of compassion and understanding, to listen to patients' concerns, to be transparent about the latest vaccine information, and to reassure patients that we have a robust vaccine safety system in Canada (see page 5).

Clinicians have a professional obligation to stay informed about COVID-19 through reliable, factual and trusted sources. We know that vaccine delays are causing great angst, as is news that variants of the virus are emerging and circulating around the world, including here in BC. Adding to the confusion and frustration is media coverage about people jumping the queue, anti-mask protests, and people in prominent positions disregarding the PHO's pleas to stay local and avoid non-essential travel. These stories are especially disheartening when most people are doing their best to follow the rules.

The College is also aware that strains on the health-care system during the pandemic have resulted in changes to treatment plans on short notice and longer wait times for patients waiting for elective surgeries. Those waiting may be at heightened risk if they live in rural areas or have a chronic health condition, physical or mobility impairment, learning disability, mental health condition, or are elderly and frail.

While this new reality is overwhelming—to patients and clinicians seeking to respond to patient concerns and inquiries—every patient deserves to receive clear communication about how they will be looked after and who they can contact if their care plan changes.

In these very challenging times, when everyone is feeling stressed and tired, clinicians can support patients by leading them to reliable information, which in BC starts with the provincial health officer and the BCCDC. Dr. Bonnie Henry and Minister of Health Adrian Dix, along with a team of experts, make decisions that affect us all based on science and careful deliberative processes. They have been committed to daily news briefings about our province's progress and frequently provide data about the spread, and they continue to update the BCCDC website with resources and information for patients and clinicians.

If you have not yet taken the time, I encourage you to become familiar with the BCCDC website. Below are some useful links for easy reference:

- [BC's COVID-19 Immunization Plan](#)
- [BCCDC COVID-19 vaccine information](#)
- [BCCDC COVID-19 resources for patients](#)
- [BCCDC COVID-19 resources for health professionals](#)

Thank you for your hard work and commitment as we manage this pandemic together, especially to those on the front-line who have risked their own health to serve patients with COVID-19.

We are all indebted to you.

Heidi M. Oetter, MD
Registrar and CEO

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