



## Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination for Health Care Providers

Updated October 2021

### Background

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been much discussion around mandating vaccines for health care professionals. Evidence shows that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective and are integral for health care providers who are frequently in close contact with vulnerable and at-risk patients and clients.

As such, on September 13, 2021, Provincial Health Officer Dr Bonnie Henry and Minister of Health Adrian Dix announced that COVID-19 vaccination would become mandatory for BC health care professionals as a condition of employment for those who work in all health care facilities, including at contracted locations.<sup>i</sup> This includes health care professionals who work in hospitals and clinics, as well as in home and community care. The policy will come into effect on October 26, 2021, following the requirement that staff in long-term and assisted living care be vaccinated by October 12. In both cases, all health care providers including administrators, volunteers, and personal support workers will be required to be fully vaccinated. For those seeking exemption for medical or religious reasons, allowances will be made pending Provincial Health Office approval to accommodate changes to employment that reduce the exposure to patients and clients (another job, additional testing, additional PPE etc.). Those who are unable to be accommodated may be put on a leave of absence.

This new implementation is necessary as COVID-19 continues to spread, particularly among those who are unvaccinated or only partially vaccinated. Based on data from September 2021, unvaccinated individuals are ten times more likely to develop COVID-19, forty-seven times more likely to become hospitalized from severe illness, and nine times more likely to die from COVID-19, when compared to fully vaccinated individuals (adjusted for age differences).<sup>ii</sup> BC officials reported 1984 new cases of COVID-19 cases in the province over the course of September 10 to 13, and the number of patients currently in intensive care with COVID-19 has increased significantly over last month.<sup>iii</sup>

Of COVID-19 cases among health care providers in Canada, the majority of cases have occurred in health care aides, registered nurses, health care administrators, and licensed practical nurses (21.2%, 16.3%, 8.3% and 5.3% respectively).<sup>iv</sup> In addition to being in close contact with patients and clients in the course of their work, because many of these health care workers are also in direct contact with members of the public, they constitute a plausible risk to numerous vulnerable people if they do become infected.

On July 22, 2021 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) published an article entitled, [Why mandatory COVID-19 vaccines for health care workers could help Canada fight a 4th wave](#), which summarizes the debate about mandatory vaccines amongst health care workers in Canada.<sup>v</sup> Within this article, health care professionals and researchers from across Canada note that by vaccinating all health care workers, the consequences from a potential COVID-19 fourth wave would be more readily manageable if all health care providers were vaccinated.<sup>vi</sup> Countries such as France, Italy, and Germany have already instituted mandatory vaccination for those working in health care, especially as cases increase due to the highly transmissible Delta variant.<sup>vii</sup>

In August 2021, the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) along with the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) voiced support for mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations in all jurisdictions across Canada.<sup>viii</sup> In a [joint news release](#), the two organizations noted that instituting mandatory COVID-19 vaccination would help to better protect patients, the health workforce, as well as the health care system's overall capacity.<sup>ix</sup> The statement further commented on health care professionals' fundamental duty of providing safe and ethical care, and that all health care providers can continue to lead by example through vaccination campaigns.<sup>x</sup> A vaccination mandate for health care providers working in community and acute settings is similar to the [influenza immunization policy which was implemented in BC in 2012](#). This required health care providers to either receive an annual influenza vaccine or wear a mask while working in patient care areas during the influenza season.<sup>xi,xii</sup> In 2019, this policy was amended so that health care workers who refused to become vaccinated or wear a mask no longer faced punitive measures. However, nurses know that as leaders in health promotion, it is



integral for the nursing profession to collectively stand behind the evidence and support nurses in following all necessary measures which include getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

Nurses are leaders in immunization and as such are ideally positioned to provide the public with context around the importance of vaccination and empower people to make choices based on evidence and science. Moreover, nurses are 'arbiters of truth'<sup>xiii</sup> and our professional standards and nursing Code of Ethics ensure that nurses understand their professional obligations. It is a longstanding common practice that nurses are required to be vaccinated for many communicable diseases and/or to undergo regular monitoring for others (for example, tuberculosis). While nurses are not legally required to have an annual influenza vaccination, they are strongly encouraged to do so, or to adhere to other guidelines to help stop the spread of influenza. When it comes to extremely transmissible serious illnesses such as COVID-19, nurses recognize the importance of becoming fully vaccinated to protect not only themselves and their families, but to protect the lives of their patients.

While NNPBC recognizes that there is a [nursing shortage](#), and it would be regrettable if an occasional nurse amongst a very small minority who are not already vaccinated felt the need to withdraw from practice to avoid having to accept vaccination, in a global pandemic such as this the health of patients and the public remains the profession's top priority. It is therefore imperative to support mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for health care workers in long-term care, community, and acute settings.

### Key Messages

- On September 13, 2021, PHO Dr Henry and Health Minister Dix announced that COVID-19 vaccination would become mandatory for health care providers in home and community care, long-term care, and acute settings as a condition of employment.
- Health care professionals who work in long-term care, community, and acute care settings as well as contracted locations will be required to be fully vaccinated.
- Nurses are ideally suited to provide evidence-based information regarding vaccines to help address vaccine hesitancy with facts and scientific evidence.
- Nursing professional standards and the Code of Ethics set the baseline for nursing behaviour and approaches.
- NNPBC believes that nurses must continue to hold sacred the public trust and abide by our first principle, to provide safe, competent, and ethical care to all.
- A small minority of nurses remain unvaccinated (approximately 10%) and while it would be unfortunate to see any change in their practice as a result of the vaccine, the priority must remain on protecting the public from COVID-19.
- One of the most effective ways to protect the public is to ensure that health care professionals in long-term care, community and acute settings receive their full and recommended doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

### Further Reading/Resources

- [NNPBC Blog: Tackling Vaccine Hesitance: A Nursing Approach](#)
- [Understanding the COVID-19 Delta Variant](#)
- [Tackling Vaccine Hesitancy – What Can Nurses Do?](#)
- [Michael Sandler on CBC Radio re: Protests and Vaccines for Health Care Workers – September 13, 2021](#)
- [Michael Sandler on Global National re: Anti-Science Demonstrations – September 13, 2021](#)
- [Michael Sandler on Global BC Morning News re: Vaccination for Health Care Workers in Community and Acute Settings – September 14, 2021](#)



- [BCCDC: COVID-19 Weekly Data](#)
- [ImmunizeBC: Is Immunization Mandatory in Canada?](#)
- [CMA and CNA Call for Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccinations for Health Care Workers](#)
- [WHO: COVID-19 and Mandatory Vaccination: Ethical Considerations and Caveats](#)

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<sup>i</sup> Lindsay, Bethany. *CBC*. COVID-19 vaccines to be mandatory for workers in all health-care settings in B.C. September 13, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/covid-update-sept13-1.6173852>

<sup>ii</sup> BC Centre for Disease Control. BCCDC Data Summary: September 9, 2021. Published September 15, 2021. [http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID\\_sitrep/2021-09-09\\_Data\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID_sitrep/2021-09-09_Data_Summary.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Lindsay, Bethany. *CBC*. *COVID-19 vaccines to be mandatory for workers in all health-care settings in B.C.*

<sup>iv</sup> BC Centre for Disease Control. COVID-19 Cases in Healthcare Workers in BC, January 2020 – June 18, 2021. June 23, 2021. [http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID\\_sitrep/COVID19\\_healthcare\\_workers\\_2021\\_06\\_18.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID_sitrep/COVID19_healthcare_workers_2021_06_18.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> Miller, Adam. *CBC*. Why mandatory COVID-19 vaccines for health care workers could help Canada fight a 4<sup>th</sup> wave. July 22, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/canada-mandatory-vaccines-covid-19-healthcare-workers-1.6111486>

<sup>vi</sup> Miller, Adam. *CBC*. *Why mandatory COVID-19 vaccines for health care workers could help Canada fight a 4<sup>th</sup> wave.*

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid

<sup>viii</sup> CMA and CNA (joint statement). CMA and CNA call for mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for health care workers. August 3, 2021. <https://www.cma.ca/news-releases-and-statements/cma-and-cna-call-mandatory-covid-19-vaccinations-health-care-workers>

<sup>ix</sup> CMA and CNA. *Call for mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for HCW.*

<sup>x</sup> Ibid

<sup>xi</sup> Wignall, A. Mandatory Influenza Immunization for Health Care Workers: A Recent Policy Change. 2019. <https://www.nnpbc.com/mandatory-influenza-immunization-for-health-care-workers-a-recent-policy-change/>

<sup>xii</sup> BC Government Ministry of Health. Influenza Control Program: FAQs. 2018. [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/faq\\_influenza-vaccine-provincial.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/faq_influenza-vaccine-provincial.pdf)

<sup>xiii</sup> Canadian Nurses Association. In times of misinformation, why nurses' first duty must be the truth. January 18, 2021. <https://www.cna-aiic.ca/en/news-room/news-releases/2021/in-times-of-misinformation-why-nurses-first-duty-must-be-the-truth>