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**To:** Nova Scotia Influenza Vaccine Providers

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

**Date:** September 28, 2020

**Re:** ***INFLUENZA VACCINATION PROGRAM FOR 2020-2021***

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The annual influenza vaccination season is fast approaching. Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent influenza and associated complications.

**The influenza vaccine is recommended and publicly funded for all Nova Scotians ages 6 months or older.**

While all Nova Scotians are encouraged to be immunized, it is particularly important for individuals 65 years and older, residents of long term care facilities, pregnant women, children aged 6-59 months, individuals living with chronic diseases and indigenous people (*who are at increased risk due to a high occurrence of chronic health conditions, reduced access to health care, and other social and environmental factors such as poor housing conditions*). In addition, this year, to reduce the risk of severe illness that could arise from possible co-infection of COVID-19 and influenza, people at high risk of COVID-19 related illness are strongly encouraged to be immunized. It is also important that individuals who live with, or provide care to, anyone in the above groups also receive flu vaccine.

The COVID-19 pandemic creates a series of challenges for the delivery of the influenza immunization program. This year, providers need to consider a range of strategies to provide safety while maintaining or increasing vaccine uptake. Adaptations include pre-screening for COVID-19, reducing clinic crowding by using appointments, keeping physical distance whenever possible, requiring hand washing and mask wearing, and using technology to reduce contact (i.e. online registration, consent and recording processes).

The inactivated high-dose trivalent vaccine will again be available for Long Term Care Facility (LTCF) residents 65 years of age and older. LTCFs include nursing homes and residential care facilities. **For 2020-21 only**, patients in hospital beds in Nova Scotia who are designated as *alternate level of care*, awaiting LTCF placement, and aged 65 years and older will be eligible for the inactivated high-dose trivalent influenza vaccine.

The inactivated quadrivalent standard dose vaccine will be available for all other individuals 6 months of age and older.

## **Vaccine Supply/Ordering**

The timeframe for influenza immunization in Nova Scotia is from mid-October to mid-December. As in previous years, Public Health will be receiving multiple shipments of vaccine over several weeks and must ensure it is distributed equitably across the province to a range of immunization providers. Immunization providers are asked to initially order a two to four-week supply of influenza vaccine and re-order for additional two to four-week periods based on vaccine uptake and anticipated demand. Public Health may need to limit the amount of vaccine given in a single order to an individual provider to ensure reasonable access for all Nova Scotians and all providers.

Specific information on influenza vaccine ordering will be provided from the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) provincial bio-depot. All vaccine providers will be able to order quadrivalent standard dose vaccine but order forms for high-dose trivalent vaccine will only be sent to LTCFs and Pharmacies and Family Physicians identified by a LTCF as being responsible for influenza vaccine administration to residents. For those eligible patients aged 65 years and older in hospital designated as *alternate level of care* and awaiting LTCF placement, order forms will be sent by local public health to hospitals.

I ask that you plan your immunization clinics accordingly throughout the two-month timeframe and to place a priority on immunizing people at greatest risk of influenza-related complications. As pharmacists are unable to vaccinate children under 2 years of age, I also encourage collaboration between pharmacists and physicians to ensure these children have access to vaccine.

Influenza immunization also presents an opportunity to ensure your patients immunization status is up to date; for example, their MMR and pneumococcal vaccines.

Your participation and support in the promotion of the annual influenza program is greatly appreciated. More details on the program are in the accompanying document: *Publicly Funded Seasonal Inactivated Influenza Vaccine Information for 2020-2021*.

## **Influenza Illness Management**

To support clinical management of influenza illness and the appropriate use of antivirals, the Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease Canada (AMMI) has developed an Flu App <https://www.ammi.ca/?ID=72>

Alternatively, the AMMI clinical guidelines for influenza are available at <https://www.ammi.ca/Content/Guidelines/Flu%20%28published%20version%29%20FINAL.pdf>