
NEWS RELEASE

Not Approved
March 18, 2021

Office of the Premier
Ministry of Health

Front-line workers prioritized as COVID-19 vaccine rollout accelerates

VICTORIA – More than 300,000 front-line workers, including first responders, grocery store employees, and teachers and child care workers will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccinations over the coming weeks, as the Province’s COVID-19 Immunization Plan moves forward ahead of schedule.

“We know how challenging this pandemic has been on our front-line workers,” said Premier John Horgan. “Many of these people have come to work throughout this pandemic, continuing to teach and care for our children, stock the shelves of our local grocery store and keep our communities safe. By immunizing these front-line workers, we are making workplaces and communities throughout our province safer.”

Beginning in April, people in priority groups identified by public health and the COVID-19 Workplace Task Group will start to receive their first dose of the AstraZeneca/SII COVISHIELD (AZ/SII) vaccine. These groups include:

- first responders (police, firefighters, emergency transport);
- K-12 educational staff;
- child care staff;
- grocery store workers;
- postal workers;
- bylaw and quarantine officers;
- manufacturing workers;
- wholesale/warehousing employees;
- staff living in congregate housing at places such as ski hills;
- correctional facilities staff; and
- cross-border transport staff.

These priority groups have been identified as workers in places and sectors where:

- the use of personal protective equipment and barriers can be challenging;
- outbreaks and clusters have occurred or are ongoing;
- workers must live or work in congregate settings; or
- maintaining the workforce for a critical service is necessary.

“Our age-based rollout is ahead of schedule and with the AstraZeneca/SII supply arriving, we can protect people working in specific, front-line industries,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “Following the latest science and data to identify high-risk industries or critical services will allow us to protect even more people from COVID-19, which in turn, gives our entire communities and our province greater protection from the virus.”

These sectors or settings prioritized for the AZ/SII vaccine are in addition to the workplaces previously identified by public health where vaccines are being used to assist with outbreak response. Currently in B.C., the first shipment of AZ/SII is being deployed to protect people in workplaces identified as having the highest risk of COVID-19 transmission, including:

- food processing plants, including poultry, fruit and fish processing;
- agricultural operations with congregate worker accommodations, including farms, nurseries and greenhouses; and
- large industrial camps with congregate accommodations for workers.

“The additional supply of the AstraZeneca/SII vaccine allows us to strategically target immunizations to maximize the protection of our province,” said Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.’s provincial health officer. “With each person who receives any of our three safe and effective vaccines, we are all that much safer. This targeted outreach builds on the momentum we now have with our age-based program to protect those who have been at work every day, without break and without question, for the past year.”

In total, B.C. expects to receive approximately 340,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine by the end of May 2021. The Province will use a combination of community pharmacists, existing immunization clinics and mobile clinics at some worksites to administer the AstraZeneca vaccine to front-line workers.

Booking arrangements for front-line workers will be established in the coming weeks and will be communicated clearly and directly to each sector to arrange bookings. Workers identified as “front-line” and prioritized for the AstraZeneca vaccine should not call into regional health authority call centres at this time.

“We want to thank everyone in B.C. for doing their part as we rolled out our call centre program to support the largest immunization program in this province’s history,” said Dr. Penny Ballem, executive lead, B.C.’s immunization plan rollout. “We have made significant progress after some initial challenges and we can proudly say that we are on track to have everyone immunized by this summer.”

The age-based vaccine rollout using the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines is also accelerating and moving forward ahead of schedule. Currently, every senior born in 1941 or before (80 years old and over) and Indigenous peoples born in or before 1956 (65 years old and over) will be eligible to book a vaccination appointment by Friday, March 19.

The next age cohort is eligible to call as early as Saturday, March 20, 2021. The call centre approach through health authorities has now been extended to include those born between the years of 1942 to 1951 (79-70 year olds) and Indigenous peoples born in 1966 and before (55 and over).

This age cohort call-in schedule will begin as follows:

- age 79 and Indigenous peoples 55 and older – Saturday, March 20 at noon
- age 78 – Monday, March 22 at noon
- age 77 – Tuesday, March 23 at noon
- age 76 – Thursday, March 25 at noon
- age 75 – Saturday, March 27 at noon

The call-in schedule for the age 70 to 74 age cohort will be announced in the coming days.

The provincial registration and booking system, both online and by phone, will be implemented starting April 6, 2021, for people between the ages of 65-69. As a result, the Province has adjusted timelines for Phase 3 and Phase 4 of B.C.'s COVID-19 Immunization Plan.

Everyone in B.C. who is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine will now be able to receive a first dose before July 1, 2021 (see backgrounder).

Workers, workplaces and industries prioritized in B.C.'s plan have been identified based on recommendations and input of a number of national and provincial groups, including the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, COVID-19 Workplace Task Group and B.C.'s Immunization Committee.

Learn More:

To view the March 18, 2021, PowerPoint presentations, visit: (Link to PPT)

To learn about B.C.'s COVID-19 Immunization Plan and the Phase 2 rollout, visit:

www.gov.bc.ca/bcseniorsfirst

And: www.gov.bc.ca/covidvaccine

For technical immunization information, visit the BC Centre for Disease Control's website:

www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine

For more information on what to expect when you go to get vaccinated for COVID-19, visit:

www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine/getting-a-vaccine

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BACKGROUND

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Timelines for vaccinations

As a result of increased vaccine supply and shifting dose-two timelines to 16 weeks, B.C. is now in position to adjust previously announced timelines for the general population for the COVID-19 vaccine.

The below timelines are contingent on vaccine supply and the latest available science and data. These timelines may be adjusted.

Phase 3

People aged 79 to 60, in five-year increments:

- 79 to 75 (dose 1 (D1) April)
- 74 to 70 (D1 April)
- 69 to 65 (D1 April)
- 64 to 60 (D1 April/May)
- People aged 69 to 16 who are clinically extremely vulnerable (D1 March/April)

For a list of who is considered extremely vulnerable:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/vaccine/plan#clinically-vulnerable>

Phase 4

People aged 59 to 18, in five-year increments:

- 59 to 55 (D1 May)
- 54 to 50 (D1 May)
- 49 to 45 (D1 May)
- 44 to 40 (D1 May/June)
- 39 to 35 (D1 May/June)
- 34 to 30 (D1 June)
- 29 to 25 (D1 June)
- 24 to 18 (D1 June)

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