



CANADIAN FEDERATION
OF NURSES UNIONS
LA FÉDÉRATION CANADIENNE
DES SYNDICATS D'INFIRMIÈRES
ET INFIRMIERS

COVID-19 Vaccination Position Statement

Updated July 16, 2021

The CFNU encourages nurses, other health care workers and the general public to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to protect themselves, their families, their colleagues and vulnerable patients/residents/clients, as well as to prevent the overextension of all our health care services, including hospital, long-term care, home care and public health resources.

- Each individual must have the opportunity to inform themselves of the potential risks and benefits of immunization, based on their understanding of the scientific evidence.
- The CFNU will continue to provide clear evidence-informed information and resources to assist members and the general public to understand the risks and benefits of vaccination.
- Employers, working in conjunction with nurses unions, also have a role to play in education and developing supportive policies to encourage nurses, other health care workers and the general public to benefit from vaccination.
- Members with questions or concerns about the vaccine are encouraged to reach out to their unions, educate themselves and consult with their health care provider.
- For nurses who are unable to receive the vaccine, the CFNU recommends that they contact their union representative.
- Employers should work with nurses and nurses unions to ensure that those health care workers who are unable to be vaccinated have access to work that keeps them and their patients, residents or clients as safe as possible. Employers have a legal duty to accommodate for disabilities, religion/creed or other protected human rights grounds.
- The CFNU believes that any risk posed by the vaccine is outweighed by the benefits to CFNU's members and the public in being protected from COVID-19.
- However, the CFNU does not support mandatory vaccination programs: mandatory or coercive means of promoting vaccination could inadvertently contribute to vaccine hesitancy. In addition, the CFNU supports the rights of all individuals to voluntary consent to any medical treatment, as guaranteed under *The Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The CFNU believes making vaccines as accessible as possible for all Canadians, offering education, encouragement and support are the best means of achieving Canada's vaccination goals.
- While vaccination plays a significant role in workplace infection prevention and control of airborne diseases, it is only one component of a larger plan. Employers must have a comprehensive infectious disease prevention and control plan in place that includes adequate staffing, reducing overcrowding, providing handwashing stations, isolating those with infectious diseases within facilities, ventilation measures, training and access to, and the use of, [PPE suitable for airborne viruses like COVID-19](#), including fitted N95 respirators or equivalent or above.

- Regardless of vaccination status, health care organizations should continue to adhere to, reinforce and monitor the full range of existing infection prevention and control measures and guidance, including universal masking, eye protection, physical distancing, engineering and administrative controls.
- While vaccination has significantly reduced transmission in the community, given the increased transmissibility and uncertainty around new variants, the questions that remain with respect to the longevity of the protection provided by vaccines and the efficacy of vaccines against new variants, as well as the number of people who are not yet fully vaccinated both in Canada and abroad, so the CFNU believes that a precautionary approach to protect health care workers must prevail. Public health measures are recommended in conjunction with a continued vaccine rollout.

Background

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions welcomes Health Canada's approval of a number of COVID-19 vaccines and the accelerated rollout of vaccine administration across Canada.

The rapid development of a number of different vaccines for COVID-19 within less than a year highlights the ingenuity of the scientific community working together towards the global objective of containing the virus and limiting its spread. Large-scale trials on the efficacy of vaccines, with tens of thousands of participants, were undertaken, which resulted in high rates of protection. Canada's assessment of the scientific and clinical evidence is done independently by Health Canada; this approval process is known to be stringent. While there have been rare side effects, overall vaccines have proved safe and effective.

Historically, immunization programs have saved countless lives worldwide. The COVID-19 vaccine offers much-needed protection against the continued spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. However, the global goal of reducing the spread of COVID-19 can only be achieved if sufficient numbers choose to be vaccinated. For COVID-19, experts are aiming for a vaccination rate of 90% of the population to achieve herd immunity.

The successful rollout of the vaccine remains crucial to Canada's objective of containing the virus and bringing this pandemic to an end. Governments, at all levels, must work collaboratively and transparently, including with nurses unions, to implement a COVID-19 immunization strategy.

As the national voice of Canada's nurses, the CFNU represents close to 200,000 nurses and student nurses serving on the front lines during the COVID-19 pandemic. CFNU's membership is playing a pivotal role in Canada's fight against COVID-19 and the immunization rollout strategy.

The CFNU supports the [National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#) (NACI)'s recommendation that populations most at risk of severe illness need to be targeted in order to curtail the number of deaths in Canada. It is also essential for a successful rollout that there be an effective strategy for reaching rural, remote, Indigenous communities and the homeless population in Canada, as well as urban populations most impacted by the virus.

As recommended by the NACI, those most likely to be exposed because of their work, including health care workers, must continue to be offered the opportunity to be vaccinated as soon as possible. CFNU's membership, along with other health care workers and essential workers, are at high risk of exposure to COVID-19. As such, the CFNU encourages its membership to receive the vaccine to protect themselves, their families, their colleagues, their vulnerable patients/residents/clients, and the general public.

In determining their vaccine distribution strategy, governments must continue to follow the scientific evidence and the recommendations of the [NACI](#).