

**To:** Nova Scotia Health Care Practitioners and Immunizers

**From:** Dr Shelley Deeks, Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Health

**Date:** January 4, 2023

**Re:** *Respiratory season: Disease activity and importance of vaccination*

---

Each fall and winter, health care professionals across Nova Scotia ramp up prevention and response to respiratory infections and this year is no exception. As we enter the new year, influenza disease activity is increasing, and COVID-19 activity is holding steady. Importantly, vaccination offers primary prevention against both COVID-19 and influenza. This season, there are early indications of a good match between the influenza vaccine and circulating influenza strains. For COVID-19, the current vaccine induces lower titres against the emerging JN.1 variant of interest compared to XBB.1.5, but early data suggests recipients still mount an effective immune response against JN.1 and other recent strains.

Vaccine uptake for both COVID-19 and influenza in Nova Scotia is sub-optimal. While your efforts have contributed to over 300,000 influenza vaccines and 200,000 COVID-19 vaccines being administered across the province this season, there is room for improvement. In adults 65 years and older, who are at high risk for both diseases, coverage is currently 64% for influenza vaccine and 48% for COVID-19 vaccine. Coverage is also very low among young children, for whom influenza vaccine is particularly recommended (currently 22% among children under 5 years).

Provider recommendations are a key driver of immunization uptake. We ask you to discuss, encourage, and administer both COVID-19 and influenza vaccine, address any concerns your patients may have, and communicate that it is not too late to get vaccinated, especially given current disease activity in the province. This encouragement from a trusted health care provider is particularly important for people at high risk.

We have also noted an increase in invasive Group A streptococcal disease (iGAS), compared to previous years, which can manifest as sepsis, pneumonia, necrotizing fasciitis, and streptococcal toxic shock syndrome. This increase has been noted elsewhere in Canada and globally. iGAS and other secondary bacterial infections often increase when we see increased influenza activity and is another reason to encourage influenza vaccination. Similar to influenza, the highest rates of disease occur in our oldest and youngest populations. Early diagnosis and treatment are important and public health conducts post-exposure contact management.

We thank you for your ongoing commitment to the vaccination efforts this season. For additional information, please consult:

- 1) [Canadian Immunization Guide: Communicating effectively about immunization](#)
- 2) [Nova Scotia COVID-19 Vaccine Program: Information for Health Care Professionals](#)
- 3) [Publicly Funded Seasonal Inactivated Influenza Vaccine Information for Health Care Professionals 2023-24](#)
- 4) [Nova Scotia Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Respiratory Watch Reports](#)