

# Bulletin #136: COVID-19 Information

## April 22, 2021



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### COVID-19 Bulletin

#### [Revision to the continuous use of eye protection during the Yellow phase](#)

In response to the evolving situation related to COVID-19 variants of concern (VOCs) within the province of New Brunswick, the ID-IPC Regional COVID-19 Committee is recommending that health care workers (HCWs) working in all Horizon **Emergency Departments** wear facial protection (medical grade face mask **and** eye protection (goggles / face shield)) **continuously, at all times in all areas of their workplace** during the Yellow phase when a physical barrier (i.e., plexiglass) is not in place to prevent transmission of droplets.

COVID-19 variants have been termed variants of concern (VOCs), because they have been associated with increased

transmissibility, severity of illness, and / or possible immune evasion with potential implications for reinfection.

While VOCs spread more easily, the routes of transmission for COVID-19 VOCs remain the same as non-variant COVID-19 and spread primarily by respiratory droplets and / or contact with contaminated surfaces or items. COVID-19 VOCs can also be spread through the airborne route during an Aerosol Generating Medical Procedure (AGMP).

Current Infection Prevention and Control measures are effective. Because of increased transmissibility of VOCs, the need for strict compliance with Droplet / Contact and Full Precautions (when there is risk for an AGMP) is of the utmost importance, as there is a lower margin of error with adherence to current infection prevention and control measures including donning and doffing personnel protective equipment.

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### Self-screening reminder

We want to remind all employees and physicians of the importance of remaining familiar with the screening questions.

The questions and signage for employees and physicians can be accessed [here](#). For your awareness, the patient and visitor screening questions can be found [here](#).

Remember:

- Employees and physicians are required to self screen prior to leaving home for their shift.
- Once at the facility, employees and physicians must swipe their ID badge.
- Employees and physicians who leave the facility for any reason (break, meal period, to smoke, or interfacility travel) will be required to self screen upon their return.

Employee Health is available daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. to answer any questions or concerns. Please call 1-833-978-2580 and leave a voicemail and your call will be returned within two hours.

**Please note:** If you have travelled to the Edmundston area for non-work-related purposes, please self monitor closely for symptoms.



### GNB Contact Management with Suspect Variant

This memo is replacing the memo of March 29, 2021 entitled "Contact Management: Contacts of a contact when a variant of concern is suspected".

COVID-19 variants of concern are now prevalent in our province, both through ongoing UK variant activity in Zone 4 and through more frequent travel-related introductions (including both UK and South African strains), and we continue to assess and adjust outbreak management strategies. At this critical time, we are facing increased pressure on our acute-care capacity, while also requiring more aggressive outbreak control measures that take the challenges of the variants into account, including lower thresholds for isolating contacts and expanding isolation to contacts of contacts.

The chart, [available here](#), captures the current public health contact management approach for variants of concern. It is a risk-based approach depending on the nature and context of the exposure and accounts for the vaccine rollout and effectiveness. As population level immunity increases, there will be more consideration of individual level vaccination status in determining isolation measures. Personal public health measures such as masking, distancing and hand washing remain baseline requirements.

It is important to note that this is for informational purposes and does not replace the need for public health and/or occupational health guidance and direction for specific

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scenarios. Please refer to your regional public health experts for further interpretation.

## [GNB Guidance on Second Doses](#)

Physicians and other health care providers may have clinically vulnerable patients for whom the provision of a second dose of COVID 19 vaccine at the manufacturer's interval is desired to maximize their protection.

In the context of limited vaccine supply, NACI has recommended an extended dose interval of up to 4 months ([COVID-19 vaccine extended dose intervals for early vaccine rollout and population protection in Canada: NACI recommendations - Canada.ca](#)). New Brunswick will offer second doses as soon as possible after eligible New Brunswickers have been offered their first dose, to a maximum of 14 weeks between doses but sooner when possible. In some high-risk congregate settings, the second dose is being offered as early as this month.

Given the various pressures and the complexity of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout that are beyond the control of Public Health NB, there will be almost no exceptions to this policy direction. Such exceptions would have to demonstrate significant interference with critical clinical treatment or procedure scheduling. Unfortunately, the conditions that put individuals at greatest risk for poor outcomes with COVID-19 infection



often also put them at risk of not having an optimal immune response to the vaccine.

It is important to note that extending intervals to vaccinate more people will allow faster population-level protection, but also offers protection to the individual in three ways:

1. From their own vaccination, even if partial
2. By vaccinating those around them (cocoon approach)
3. Possibly by decreasing spread of the virus in the community

The following considerations informed the NACI's evaluation and subsequent recommendation:

- Efficacy under ideal clinical trial conditions after the first dose
- Effectiveness from real world use after the first dose
- Mathematical modelling demonstrating the population-level benefits of accelerating vaccine coverage by extending dose intervals
- Experience with other multi-dose vaccines and vaccine science
- Public health principles of ethical decision making (equity, feasibility, accessibility)

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It will be challenging to navigate the coming weeks with the arrival of variant strains and the acceleration of the population level vaccine plan, so your patience and cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Any requests for rare exceptions should be sent to [COVID-19NB@gnb.ca](mailto:COVID-19NB@gnb.ca), under the heading Attention: Second dose interval request, with a clearly written rationale for review.

## GNB Critical Functions

Since March 2020 the work of Public Health New Brunswick has been focused on COVID-19 pandemic response as it has remained the top priority for the entire public health system. As we continue to manage the ongoing outbreaks, the arrival of several variants of concern have added a new level of threat and complexity. While managing outbreaks, teams are also tasked with rolling out the vaccination campaign to all New Brunswickers.

There has been a tremendous effort to date in scaling up resources, increasing capacity, integrating technology, tools and processes to effectively manage the outbreaks as one team. The outbreak response has been relentless and has required human resources 7 days a week, days and evenings. It is well recognized that the entire system has been working well beyond maximum capacity for an extended period.



At this critical time in our response, it is imperative that Public Health programming remain focused on critical priorities as part of business continuity. Until further notice, all Public Health programming and activities will be stood down effective immediately, except for the following critical activities;

- Immunization: those at risk as part of prophylaxis and outbreak management, early childhood immunization (18 months and under), maintenance of vaccine supply chain;
- CD: Priority CD case/ contact investigation, outbreak management, surveillance;
- Health Family Healthy Babies - Child protection referrals, priority prenatal and postnatal referrals and visits, hospital liaison;
- Nutrition: supplements for HFHB program, tube and supplemental feeding program;
- Inspection: response to health hazard events, high risk inspections of all licensed facilities, emergency response, safe drinking water, food recall issues;
- Provincial resilience project.

Resources need to be utilized across the province in the most efficient manner to maximize availability of staff and considers the need for bilingual capacity, 7 days per week. No zones

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should be operating in a 'business as usual' manner when there is extensive COVID-19 activity and presence of variant in even one zone of the province. Every effort must be made to ensure resources are provided to assist zones who require help.

### [GNB Guidance Regarding Pregnant Women](#)

Our understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on various populations continues to evolve. Recent events in Ontario have highlighted the risks of COVID-19 infection for pregnant women, possibly potentiated by the spread of variant strains. Pregnant women who have COVID-19 appear to be more likely to develop respiratory complications requiring intensive care, and require ventilation, compared to non-pregnant women. They are also at increased risk of premature birth and more frequent admission to the neonatal unit.

Starting in March, New Brunswick had prioritized pregnant women with two or more chronic medical conditions, given the evidence that severe morbidity from COVID-19 appeared to be greater in women with such risk factors ([SOGC Statement COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy.pdf](#)). Resources were also developed in partnership with Perinatal NB to increase access and informed consent for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

On April 15, the Society of Obstetricians of Gynecologists (SOGC) called on all provinces to immediately prioritize women who are more than 20 weeks pregnant for COVID-19



vaccination ([April 15 Statement COVID-19 Pregnant Women ICU \(sogc.org\)](#)). Moving forward, all pregnant women in New Brunswick will be eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccine regardless of the presence of other medical conditions.

Pregnant women can schedule an appointment to receive their vaccine at a Regional Health Authority community clinic by registering [online](#). If they are unable to book online, they can call 1-833-437-1424 to book an appointment.

### [GNB update](#)

When available, today's news release can be access [here](#).