



Canadian Dental Association Association dentaire canadienne

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The College of
Dental Surgeons
of Saskatchewan

December 10, 2020

The Hon. Patti Hajdu, Minister of Health
705 Red River Road, Suite 3
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7B 1J3

Re: Priority Access to COVID-19 Vaccines for Dental Health Care Professionals

Dear Minister Hajdu:

The Canadian Dental Association (CDA) welcomes and agrees with the guidance on the prioritization of initial doses of COVID-19 vaccine(s), and in particular, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization's (NACI) recommendation that initial doses of authorized COVID-19 vaccine(s) should be offered to individuals without contraindications in the following populations:

- *Residents and staff of congregate living settings that provide care for seniors*
- *Adults 70 years of age and older, beginning with adults 80 years of age and older, then decreasing the age limit by 5-year increments to age 70 years as supply becomes available*
- ***Health care workers (including all those who work in health care settings and personal support workers whose work involves direct contact with patients)***
- *Adults in Indigenous communities where infection can have disproportionate consequences.*

Dentists and the whole dental team are health care workers that are on the front lines with the Canadian public, providing them with direct urgent, emergent and routine oral health care each day, and keeping patients out of hospitals and emergency rooms. Human-to-human transmission of the COVID-19 virus occurs most frequently through direct contact, respiratory droplets or through indirect contacts. As such, due to the nature of the occupation, dentists and dental office staff face a higher COVID-19 infection risk.

On behalf of approximately 80,000 dental office staff, including 21,000 practising dentists across Canada, the CDA would like to confirm that dental health care professionals are included under the health care workers population group, as identified by NACI, and would like to work with you to ensure dental health care professionals can access COVID-19 vaccine(s) at an appropriate time. Dental health care professionals include dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, dental therapists, and all other dental office workers such as office managers and reception staff, as well as those who work in acute and long-term care settings.

The dental workforce operates in an environment where they must be in close proximity to patients, working within oral cavities to provide preventative care and oral health

treatments, and use instruments that generate aerosols or a visible spray containing water and bodily fluids. Dentists and the dental team also provide essential oral health services in Indigenous communities where there can be a disproportionately high risk of infection. For these reasons, the whole dental team must be protected to keep themselves and the patients with whom they are in direct contact, safe. Providing this group of essential workers with priority vaccine access is crucial to eliminate widespread of infection across our communities and Canada's overall population.

Safeguarding the public's oral and overall health has always been Canadian dentistry's highest priority. Dentists and the dental team are highly skilled infection control experts who always follow strict infection prevention and control protocols and procedures. The additional measures that have been put in place have proven to be effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19, allowing for the provision of oral health care for Canadians throughout the pandemic.

Research shows that delaying oral health care treatments leads to overall negative health outcomes, further oral health complications and preventable presentations to hospital emergency rooms. Providing dentists and the whole dental team with priority access to the COVID-19 vaccine will ensure that Canadians continue to receive the essential oral health care services from local dental offices without overcrowding or causing any additional burden to Canada's health care system.

Thank you for your continued collaboration with provincial Medical Officers of Health and NACI on the efficient and equitable prioritization of COVID-19 vaccines. I look forward to receiving confirmation that dental health care professionals are included in NACI's health care workers population group, which involves individuals providing direct care and having direct contact with patients. By including the dental profession as health care workers to receive priority access to the vaccine, Canada will be better positioned to protect its communities and health care capacity.

I would be pleased to address any questions or explore avenues of how the dental profession could be of assistance during these trying times. Thank you for your dedication in continuing to keep our nation safe, and the leadership you have demonstrated in this period of national crisis.

Sincerely,



James Armstrong, BSc, MBA, DMD
President

cc. Darren Fisher, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health
Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer, Public Health Agency of Canada
Jennifer Rendall, Chief of Staff to the Chief Public Health Officer, Public Health Agency of Canada
Kathryn Nowers, Director of Policy, Health Canada
Dr. Caroline Quach-Thanh, Chair, National Advisory Committee on Immunization
Provincial Ministers of Health
Provincial Chief Medical Officers of Health
Provincial Dental Associations
Provincial Dental Regulatory Authorities