

Interchangeability of vaccines (vaccine mixing)

Policy position recommendation

1. The CMA supports the recommendations issued by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)¹. People in Canada need to be assured that decisions around vaccines, including interchangeability of COVID-19 vaccines, are based on the best available evidence and expert advice.
2. The CMA calls on the federal government to reach an agreement with other countries and the WHO to standardize vaccine recognition and vaccine schedules that will be accepted for international travel, both of Canadians going abroad as well as of non-Canadians coming to Canada.

A. Background

Interchangeability of Vaccines

- Interchangeability of vaccines constitutes the substitution of different COVID-19 vaccines as second doses, in light of supply delays or safety concerns.
- The interchangeability of COVID-19 vaccines is increasingly backed by new research, though it's rooted in decades of vaccine science. It is a routine practice with vaccines for other diseases (e.g., influenza vaccines, hepatitis B vaccines, measles-mumps-rubella vaccines).

National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)

- NACI has provided recommendations to the Canadian government on the use of vaccines, drawing upon the expertise of specialists in public health, immunology, infectious diseases and pediatrics from across the country since 1964. NACI's technical advisory groups are recognized globally as a valuable resource, benefiting immunization practices and programs across Canada and internationally.²

- In the past, the CMA had a representative on NACI². Over the years, the CMA has endorsed various versions of NACI's *Canadian Immunization Guide*³ and requested that it be disseminated to all practicing physicians.
- Over the course of the pandemic, the CMA has supported NACI's framework for COVID-19 vaccine prioritization and CMA policy staff consult NACI's guidance when responding to questions in www.COVIDquestions.ca.
- Recently, NACI recommended the mixing of different COVID-19 vaccines, with either AstraZeneca or mRNA-based vaccine offered as a second dose for people who had a first shot of AstraZeneca. NACI also recommended that the same mRNA vaccines to be used for a second dose, if possible, but that another mRNA vaccine "can be considered interchangeable" if the first type is unavailable.¹
- There have been accounts of people in Canada that are refusing a vaccine, particularly if it is not the one that they have a preference for or, is not the same vaccine that was given for their first dose.
- Another issue has been that while some countries, like Canada, are adopting a mixed dosing schedule, others are outright blocking people from entry if they mixed certain vaccines. The definition of "fully vaccinated" is not uniform across the world and different countries have access to different vaccines.

B. Rationale

- NACI's recommendations are based on current evidence as well as expert opinion. NACI updates current vaccine statements and recommendations on the use of authorized COVID-19 vaccines as Health Canada approves vaccines for use in Canada and as evidence on these vaccines and COVID-19 evolves.

Approved by the CMA Board of Directors August 2021

¹ National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). *An Advisory Committee Statement (ACS) National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI): Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 Vaccines*. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; 2021 July 22. Available: <https://tinyurl.com/3d9bb73j> (accessed 2021 July 30).

² Gemmill I. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI): A celebration of fifty years of service. *CCDR Vol 40-17*, Oct 16, 2014. Available: <https://tinyurl.com/5ujuxynv> (accessed 2021 July 30).

³ Public Health Agency of Canada. *Canadian immunization guide*. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; 2021. Available: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/canadian-immunization-guide.html> (accessed 2021 July 30).