



Phase 5 of reopening

When will phase 5 start?

Because our COVID-19 activity is low and we are very close to our target of at least 75% of the population fully vaccinated, we will start phase 5 at 12:01 a.m. on September 15.

Will there still be a public health order? Will there still be a state of emergency?

There will still be a public health order to capture a few measures that will remain mandatory. The state of emergency needs to remain in effect to give force to the public health order.

What restrictions will stay in place?

Current border restrictions will remain in place, likely through the fall. That means self-isolation will still be required after travel for people who aren't fully vaccinated (at least 7 days plus 2 negative tests). International travelers will continue to follow federal requirements.

Masks will still be required for staff in long-term care facilities. Healthcare facilities will continue to set their own policies for masks and visitation.

The only restrictions that will remain in place for the general population are those related to management of COVID-19 cases. For example, people with symptoms must still get tested, isolate while they wait for results and continue to isolate if they test positive.

A new proof of vaccination policy will start October 4. Anyone age 12 or older who is not fully vaccinated will not be able to access discretionary, recreational or non-essential activities.

What are the details of the proof of vaccination policy?

The proof of vaccination policy is currently in development and will start October 4.

It will require Nova Scotians age 12 and older to show proof of full vaccination to participate in discretionary, recreational or non-essential activities. Some examples include dining out, going to a fitness facility, or going to a movie, theatre performance, concert or sporting event. These are all important activities but they are also social activities that bring people together and give the virus opportunity to spread.

The proof of vaccination policy will be a short-term measure to help bring large groups of people together safely. It will allow us to lift all restrictions within the province, fully reopen and have the best chance of staying open.

While the policy is in effect, people who are not fully vaccinated and do not have one of the very few medical reasons for not getting vaccinated will not be able to participate in these activities. People who are not yet fully vaccinated and want to participate in these activities should [book a vaccination appointment](#) as soon as possible.

We still have work to do to develop this policy. When we have more details, they will be announced publicly. We do not have any further information to share at this time.



Why are you keeping the border restrictions when other provinces aren't?

Our self-isolation requirement after travel for people who aren't fully vaccinated has been our main line of defence to protect Nova Scotians from COVID-19. It makes sense to keep that protection in place to help limit the impact of a fourth wave while we lift restrictions within the province.

What restrictions will be lifted?

There will be no more gathering limits or physical distancing requirements. Masks will no longer be mandatory in indoor public places or on public transportation, but people will still be encouraged to wear them, especially during flu season. There will be no more restrictions for residents in long-term care facilities.

While restrictions will be lifted, everyone should continue sensible precautions that have been helping us all stay safe. Workplaces should view COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses hazards to be mitigated under occupational health and safety legislation.

What are some sensible precautions people should continue to do?

First, everyone who can get vaccinated should do so. Everyone should continue staying home when sick, washing hands regularly, coughing and sneezing into your elbow, and regularly cleaning high-touch surfaces. While masks will no longer be mandatory, people will be encouraged to continue wearing them in indoor public places, especially during flu season. People should also continue to limit their travel, especially if they are not fully vaccinated.

What measures should workplaces continue to take?

First, employers should encourage their staff to get vaccinated. Many workplace safety practices should remain in place as part of general occupational health and safety efforts to protect employees and clients from both respiratory illnesses. For example, where businesses have invested in barriers, established cleaning protocols, and provided support for hand hygiene to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, they should keep them in place. Employers should support employees to stay home when they are sick.

Can employers make vaccination mandatory for employees? Can businesses refuse service to people who are not fully vaccinated?

Businesses and organizations can set their own vaccination policies. Any policies should take legal and ethical implications into consideration. There need to be are options for people who are not fully vaccinated and are accessing businesses and other settings that are not subject to the proof of vaccination policy. If you have questions or concerns, please contact hrcinquiries@novascotia.ca.

Can a business or organization set its own policies requiring distancing and masks, for example?

A business or organization should follow general guidance for living safely with COVID-19 in a highly vaccinated population. They can choose to set their own policies with safety measures for employees, volunteers and/or clients. From an occupational health and safety perspective, businesses need to treat COVID-19 and other illnesses as hazards to be mitigated.

Should people continue doing regular asymptomatic testing?

With a highly vaccinated population, regular asymptomatic testing will no longer be recommended. It



will still be available for incoming travelers as well as close contacts of confirmed cases and anyone else who is directed by Public Health to get tested.

Will asymptomatic testing continue in workplaces or other specific settings?

Nearly 200 employers are offering rapid testing programs with approval from the Department of Health and Wellness as part of general safety efforts in the workplace. This helps with our surveillance efforts. We also have the ability to do targeted asymptomatic testing with the mobile public health units if needed.

How will you catch cases and prevent spread if you don't do broad asymptomatic testing?

There are more than 250 employers who've adopted workplace testing programs and many more that are interested. These testing programs will help us with surveillance among asymptomatic people.

Regular testing has made me feel safe. Why can't we keep regular testing?

With a highly vaccinated population, regular asymptomatic testing for the general population is no longer needed. We can't continue to dedicate valuable health system resources to something that is no longer warranted.

Is there likely to be a fourth wave and another lockdown?

Living with COVID-19 in a highly vaccinated population will be different than what we've seen in the past. Because of our high vaccinated rates, we have sufficient population immunity to live with the virus. People will get sick but not as severely.

So even though we may see case numbers in a fourth wave that would have led to increased restrictions in the past, our good vaccination coverage should mean that we can carry on with only the border restrictions and other sensible precautions like handwashing, staying home when you're sick and choosing to wear a mask. That said, we are prepared to reinstate restrictions if necessary, likely targeted to a local area rather than provincewide.

Will there still be contact tracing?

Public Health will contact and continue to follow all new lab-confirmed positive cases. However, they will only do contact tracing with close contacts who are not fully vaccinated.

Will you continue daily reporting of case numbers? Will you hold livestreamed briefings?

Since the pandemic began, we've been reporting daily case numbers through our online dashboard and this will continue on weekdays. We have already moved to news release only on weekdays and will shift to providing a summary news release once a week. Briefings will be given when needed.

With no gathering limit, does that mean large events can happen? Do they have to be hosted by a recognized business or organization?

There will be no requirements related to gatherings in the public health order. However, we'll continue to provide some guidance for holding events safely. Businesses hosting events need to recognize that measures to prevent respiratory illnesses are part of their occupational health and safety responsibilities to their employees and patrons. Many of the safety measures they've been taking for COVID-19 to date should continue.



Can sports return to normal?

There will be no requirements related to sports practices, games, competitions and tournaments in the public health order. This includes school sports. However, people should continue to follow general guidance for living safely with COVID-19 in a highly vaccinated population.

Will schools be back to normal in phase 5?

Almost everything is back to normal in schools but masks are still required for all grades. Masks will remain in schools until September 20, allowing students, teachers and staff to transition to phase 5. Masks will continue to be strongly encouraged in classrooms and hallways.

Do all sectors that have COVID-19 prevention plans need to continue following those plans?

Many [sectors had approved COVID-19 prevention plans](#) that had the force of law under the public health order. They will no longer be included in the public health order but this is important guidance for these sectors. All sector organizations should update their plans, post them on their websites and encourage their members to follow them.