Federal/Provincial/Territorial/Indigenous (FPTI) consensus approach to minimize open-vial COVID-19 vaccine wastage

Key message

The goal of Canada's COVID-19 vaccination program is to maximize vaccination coverage rates across all jurisdictions and offer a full course of vaccine to everyone in Canada for whom it is authorised. Every opportunity should be leveraged to vaccinate eligible individuals, even where there is potential for open-vial wastage.

Use of this document

This document is intended to support a FPTI consensus approach to open-vial COVID-19 vaccine wastage at the current stage of the COVID-19 immunization campaign. This document considered NACI's *elements to guiding ethical decision making* in its development, which seeks to minimize open-vial wastage while ensuring equity, feasibility, and acceptability of Canada's COVID-19 vaccination program.

Context

Although Canada is now in a surplus position with regard to COVID-19 vaccine supply, many other countries have limited access to COVID-19 vaccines, and therefore it is very important to maximize the use of the available vaccines and limit avoidable wastage.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), vaccine wastage can be expected in all immunization programs. Closed vial wastage (i.e., where the vial has not been punctured/is unopened) is usually attributable to cold chain management practices and can be minimized. Open vial wastage (i.e., where the vial has been punctured/is opened) can be reduced by improved immunization strategies and practices.

Achieving maximal vaccine coverage rates across Canada is important for the following reasons:

- To directly protect as many people as possible from SARS-CoV-2 infection, COVID-19 disease, and severe COVID-19 outcomes, including death;
- To help prevent spread of infection to others, as well as to help prevent the start and spread of outbreaks;
- To decrease circulation of the virus in the community.

Only multi-dose vials are currently available for all Health Canada approved vaccines under the Interim Order. The Public Health Agency of Canada will continue to request that COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers produce formulations with fewer doses per vial in order to limit open-vial vaccine wastage as the pandemic evolves.

All attempts should be made to minimize wastage

Given that only multi-dose vials are available to Canada, some wastage is inevitable as efforts are made to immunize remaining unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people, particularly where vaccines are offered outside of larger immunization clinics (e.g., pharmacies, health care providers' offices, walk-in or community pop-up locations in urban settings, and remote and isolated communities). The acceptance of open-vial wastage in these settings is balanced against the principles of equitable access whereby

COVID-19 vaccines must be accessible to everyone for whom they are authorized. All efforts should be made to minimize wastage including:

- Having plans to immunize as many people as possible when a vial is opened/reconstituted (e.g. preparing a waitlist of clients that providers can call at the end of the day; utilizing social media to advertise extra available COVID-19 vaccines);
- Maximizing the reach of the doses by transporting open vials or pre-filled syringes to other sites in accordance with the Product Monograph or best practices;
- If it is anticipated that a full vial may not be used in a particular location, attempting to use an alternative product with fewer doses per vial thereby incurring less wastage (i.e., use the Pfizer-BioNTech product if it is available, which has fewer doses per vial than the Moderna product).

Consensus approach

Vaccinating individuals should be prioritized over minimizing open-vial wastage. There may be circumstances where a new vial must be opened to vaccinate only one or a few people, and plans cannot be implemented to use the remaining doses in the vial. In these cases, immunization providers should take every opportunity to vaccinate every eligible person who presents for vaccination, even if it requires puncturing a multi-dose vial and results in the remainder of the vial being discarded in accordance with the Product Monograph or best practices.