



## **Phase 5 of reopening**

### **When will phase 5 start?**

Phase 5 will start with a cautious approach on October 4. Most restrictions will be lifted but some will remain in place.

### **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 be lifted? What restrictions will stay in place?**

- There will no longer be a requirement for physical distance.
- There will no longer be gathering limits for events hosted by a business organization. The informal gathering limits of 25 people indoors and 50 outdoors will remain in place.
- Masks will still be required in indoor public places, even where proof of full vaccination is required.
- A new [proof of vaccination protocol](#) 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.
- Current border restrictions will remain in place and be expanded to include people coming from PEI and Newfoundland and Labrador. 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.
- Otherwise, 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.
- While most 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 the details of the proof of vaccination protocol?**

Starting October 4, proof of full vaccination will be required 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 requirement is for Nova Scotians age 12 and older. There minimal exceptions and there are grace periods for youth to get vaccinated.

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The proof of full vaccination requirement is a short-term measure to help bring large groups of people together safely. It will allow us to lift most restrictions within the province and can keep moving forward even in the midst of the fourth wave.

People who are not yet fully vaccinated and want to participate in these activities should [book a vaccination appointment](#) as soon as possible.

See more information and resources in [COVID-19 Protocol for Proof of Full Vaccination for Events and Activities](#).

### **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. We're expanding these restrictions to apply to people who come from PEI and Newfoundland and Labrador. That includes Nova Scotians who go to those provinces and return.

### **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. 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.

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

Sectors that had [approved COVID-19 prevention plans](#) still need them as part of their occupational health and safety obligations to treat COVID-19 as a hazard to be mitigated in the workplace. All sector organizations should update their plans to reflect current requirements and safety practices, post them on their websites and encourage their members to follow them.

### **Are masks still required in private workplaces?**

Masks will still be required in indoor public places. This includes private workplaces when people interact with the public, where there is poor ventilation and in common areas. Masks are still recommended when physical distance cannot be maintained in workplaces but it is not required.

### **Can employers make vaccination mandatory for employees?**

Businesses and organizations can set their own vaccination policies. Any policies should take legal and ethical implications into consideration. If you have questions or concerns, please contact [hrcinquiries@novascotia.ca](mailto:hrcinquiries@novascotia.ca).



### **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. People who are not fully vaccinated still need to be able to access essential services, such as groceries, pharmacies, healthcare and more. If you have questions or concerns, please contact [hrcinquiries@novascotia.ca](mailto:hrcinquiries@novascotia.ca).

### **Can a business or organization set its own policies requiring distancing or limiting the number of people, 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?**

Now that we have a highly vaccinated population, regular asymptomatic testing is no longer recommended or available. People who are fully vaccinated and practicing healthy habits to avoid respiratory illnesses are at low risk for COVID-19.

You can still [book an asymptomatic test](#) for certain reasons:

- I was at one of the exposure sites at the date and time identified in a recent Public Health public service announcement.
- I was in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 during the last 14 days.
- I have been outside of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island or Newfoundland and Labrador in the last 14 days.
- I am scheduled for a medical procedure at a hospital and need a test prior to my appointment.
- I tested positive for COVID-19 on a rapid test and need to confirm my result.
- I was directed by Public Health to get tested.

We will continue to target asymptomatic testing with mobile units and pop up sites as needed in communities where there are high cases and signs of community spread.

The Nova Scotia Health Authority only offered general asymptomatic testing in the past to help manage the pandemic. People were never supposed to book tests at their sites for travel or other purposes. If a travel destination or someone else requires a negative test result, contact [PRAXES](#) or [Switch Health](#) for information about their testing services.

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

People who are fully vaccinated and practicing healthy habits to avoid respiratory illnesses are at low risk for COVID-19. That's why 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.

### **Will asymptomatic testing continue in workplaces or other specific settings?**

About 400 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 will continue to target asymptomatic testing with mobile units and pop up sites as needed in communities where there are high cases and signs of community spread.

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

There are about 400 who've adopted workplace testing programs and many more that are interested. These testing programs will help us with surveillance among asymptomatic people. We will also continue to target asymptomatic testing with mobile units and pop up sites as needed in communities where there are high cases and signs of community spread.

**Is there likely to be another lockdown?**

Living with COVID-19 in a highly vaccinated population will be different than what we've seen in the past. We have good population immunity. People will get sick but not as severely. We're taking a cautious approach and keeping some restrictions in place so we can continue moving forward and avoid reinstating restrictions. That said, we are prepared to reinstate restrictions if necessary, likely targeted to a local area rather than provincewide.

**Will Public Health still do 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 eventually shift to providing a summary news release once a week. Briefings will continue to be given when needed.

**With no gathering limit, does that mean large events can happen?**

There will be no gathering limit or physical distancing for events hosted by a recognized business or organization. However, people who are 12 and older need to provide [proof of full vaccination](#) to attend discretionary events and activities. Masks continue to required indoors.

The informal gathering limit of 25 people indoors and 50 outdoors remains in place, such as gatherings at a person's home.

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 gathering limits or physical distance requirements for sports practices, games, competitions and tournaments in the public health order. However, people who are 12 and older need to provide proof of full vaccination to attend discretionary events and activities. (See POV FAQ.) Masks are recommended for players when possible (indoors and outdoors). They are required indoors for spectators and others. This includes school sports.



**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.

**Do businesses and organizations need to keep collecting contact information for contact tracing purposes?**

Only bars and restaurants were required to collect contact information for contact tracing under the public health order. This is no longer required as of October 4 with the start of the proof of full vaccination requirement.