MEDICAL ADVISORY: COVID-19 Vaccine Contraindications and Medical Exemptions

TO:
Family Physicians
Infectious Disease Physicians
St. Joseph’s Centre for Ambulatory Health Services, Urgent Care
Emergency Departments

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:
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FROM: Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, Medical Officer of Health, Hamilton Public Health Services
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With the August 17, 2021 provincial announcement that COVID-19 vaccination policies are mandatory in high-risk settings (i.e., hospitals, home and community care service providers, ambulance services), physicians may have some patients reach out requesting a medical exemption.

Directive #6 for COVID-19 Vaccination Policy in Health Settings specifies that employees, staff, contractors, volunteers, and students in high-risk settings must be fully vaccinated or have a medical reason prohibiting being fully vaccinated. Those with a medical reason must provide written proof from a physician or nurse practitioner.

Medical Exemptions to Directive #6

There are two vaccine contraindications that would qualify a patient for a medical exemption:

1) An allergy to a component of the vaccine as confirmed by an allergist/immunologist
   - Potential allergens include:
     - Moderna and Pfizer – polyethylene glycol
     - Moderna – tromethamine
     - AstraZeneca – polysorbate-80
     - Johnson&Johnson – polysorbate-80
   - For more information, please consult the product leaflets and/or the information contained in the product monographs available through Health Canada’s Drug Product Database
2) Myocarditis/pericarditis after a first dose of an mRNA vaccine

- As a precautionary measure, the second dose in the mRNA COVID-19 vaccination series should be deferred in individuals who experience myocarditis or pericarditis following the first dose of an mRNA vaccine until more information is available. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) will continue to monitor the evidence and update recommendations as required.

Since contraindications to mRNA vaccines (Moderna and Pfizer) are different to those for viral vector vaccines (AstraZeneca and Johnson&Johnson), most individuals with a contraindication to one platform of vaccines should still be eligible for the other and should be offered a vaccine accordingly (i.e., individuals with anaphylaxis post-mRNA vaccine may be offered a viral vector vaccine and individuals with anaphylaxis post-viral vector vaccines may be offered an mRNA vaccine).

Written Proof of a Medical Reason

- Currently there are no COVID-19 vaccination exemption affidavits for adults
- In the absence of an existing medical exemption form for COVID-19 vaccines, please write an official note from your clinic for patients that meet a medical reason for not being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 that includes:
  - The medical reason for not being fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and
  - The effective time-period for the medical reason

Policy and Procedures for Patients with a Medical Exemption

- As per Directive #6, individuals who are not fully vaccinated must undertake regular point of care rapid antigen tests and demonstrate negative results in a manner consistent with the organization covered under the directive’s vaccination policy at a minimum once every seven days.
- For patients that meet a medical reason for not being fully vaccinated against COVID-19, Directive #6 required they will need to submit to regular antigen point of care testing for COVID-19 and provide verification of the negative test result to the covered organization/high-risk setting. Testing must be a minimum once every seven days.
- Patients will need to follow policy and procedures for testing as outlined by the covered organization/high-risk setting. Patients should contact their employer or post-secondary institution directly for any questions, not Hamilton Public Health Services.

Patients Asking for a Medical Exemption Due to Precautions

Some patients may ask for a medical exemption if they have a precaution to getting a COVID-19 vaccine (e.g. hypersensitivity and allergies, acute illness, hematologic). These patients are still able to be vaccinated safely and therefore don’t qualify for a medical exemption. Guidance to counsel these patients can be found at:

- NACI: Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines. See contraindications and precautions.
- Ministry of Health: COVID-19 Vaccination Recommendations for Special Populations
- Hamilton Public Health Services: COVID-19 Vaccines Webpage
Non-Medical Exemptions

If you have patients that wish to decline vaccination for a non-medical reason, address their vaccine questions and hesitancy using the resources on the City of Hamilton’s COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions webpage.

Currently there are no COVID-19 vaccine exemption affidavits for adults. Patients can monitor the province’s vaccination website.

More Information

As more information becomes available, Hamilton Public Health Services will provide an additional update.