

Ethical Framework for COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

- Using the ethical principles outlined below to guide COVID-19 vaccine prioritization and distribution decisions and decision-making processes is critical for ethical and effective distribution and will help to promote consistency, stewardship, accountability, and public trust.
- Appreciating that the application of the following principles will to an extent be context-dependent and that other values and principles may be relevant to decision-making, this framework should serve as a guide and be adapted where appropriate.
- All levels of government have a legal obligation to take preventative steps to stop the spread of COVID-19 and treat people without discrimination. Vaccine distribution and prioritization decisions must comply with existing human rights protections and take additional steps necessary to prevent and treat COVID-19 among vulnerable groups. This Ethical Framework therefore should be read in conjunction with the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s [Policy statement on a human rights-based approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

<p>Minimize harms and maximize benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce overall illness and death related to COVID-19 • Protect those at greatest risk of serious illness and death due to biological, social, geographical, and occupational factors • Protect critical infrastructure • Promote social and economic well-being 	<p>Equity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect the equal moral status and human rights of all individuals • Distribute vaccines without stigma, bias, or discrimination¹ • Do not create, and actively work to reduce, disparities in illness and death related to COVID-19, including disparities in the social determinants of health linked to risk of illness and death related to COVID-19² • Ensure benefits for groups experiencing greater burdens from the COVID-19 pandemic 	<p>Fairness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that every individual within an equally prioritized group (and for whom vaccines have been found safe and effective) has an equal opportunity to be vaccinated • Ensure jurisdictional ambiguity does not interfere with vaccine distribution (e.g., Jordan’s Principle)³ • Ensure inclusive, consistent, and culturally safe and appropriate processes of decision-making, implementation, and communications 	<p>Transparency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the underlying principles and rationale, decision-making processes, and plans for COVID-19 vaccine prioritization and distribution are clear, understandable, and communicated publicly 	<p>Legitimacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make decisions based on the best available scientific evidence, shared values, and input from affected parties, including those historically under-represented • Account for feasibility and viability to better ensure decisions have intended impact • To the extent possible given the urgency of vaccine distribution, facilitate the participation of affected parties in the creation and review of decisions and decision-making processes
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Public Trust


Ensure decisions and decision-making processes are informed by the above principles to advance relationships of social cohesion and enhance confidence and trust in Ontario’s COVID-19 immunization program

Notes:

1. See Ontario’s [Human Rights Code](#) and specifically Part 1 for Code-protected groups
2. Consider applying the Ministry of Health’s [Health Equity Impact Assessment](#) decision support tool to identify potential health equity impacts
3. See [Jordan's Principle](#)