

COVID-19 Protocol for Self-isolation Related to Child Custody

Last Revised September 8, 2021

1.0 Introduction

Nova Scotia's [Public Health Order](#) is issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health under the authority of the Health Protection Act. Under the Public Health Order, people who enter from outside Nova Scotia must [self-isolate for 14 days](#) upon arrival in Nova Scotia unless they have an exemption.

We recognize that travel to carry out child custody agreements must continue with as little interruption as possible during the pandemic. The Public Health Order includes an exemption related to travel for the purpose of carrying out child custody agreements and gives direction to follow this protocol effective March 1, 2021. This protocol aims to balance the need to support parents and children spending time together with the need for self-isolation to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Please follow the directions below for your situation. Note that we acknowledge other people such as grandparents or guardians sometimes fill the role of parent as described throughout this protocol and they can complete the Nova Scotia Safe Check-in form as if they are a parent. If there is no scenario below that matches your situation, please contact covid19info@novascotia.ca to determine which requirements apply to you. Please include details about your specific situation.

In addition to the requirements in this protocol, everyone must also follow all the [public health measures](#) in place in Nova Scotia.

NOTE: People traveling for child custody reasons who are fully vaccinated are not required to self-isolate. They do not follow this protocol. They complete the [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in form](#) as regular travelers and must be prepared to show their proof of vaccination to border officials if asked.

Fully vaccinated means you had two doses of a World Health Organization approved vaccine (or 1 dose of Janssen) at least 14 days before arriving in Nova Scotia. A person who has not received any doses, who only has 1 dose, or who only got their second dose less than 14 days before arriving in Nova Scotia is considered to be not fully vaccinated and must follow this protocol.

NOTE: People coming from outside Canada are permitted to enter Nova Scotia for child custody visits and must follow [federal requirements for international travelers](#). They do not complete the Nova Scotia Safe Check-in form and do not follow this protocol.

2.0 Custody visits involving travel outside Atlantic Canada

This section is for people whose custody situations involve:

- Travel into Nova Scotia from another province or territory outside Atlantic Canada
or
- Travel to another province or territory outside Atlantic Canada and then return to Nova Scotia

2.1 Travel for dropping off/picking up child

Parents who are not fully vaccinated are not required to self-isolate in Nova Scotia when they travel for the purpose of dropping off a child with the other parent or picking up a child and the trip is done within 24 hours. The parent must complete the [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#). They will receive a confirmation email which they must show to border officials when they arrive in Nova Scotia, but they will not receive a daily check-in email. Testing is not required.

This applies when a parent:

- travels from outside Atlantic Canada and to drop off/pick up a child in Nova Scotia and then leaves the province within 24 hours
or
- travels somewhere outside Atlantic Canada to drop off/pick up a child and then returns to Nova Scotia within 24 hours

As an example, the parent might fly outside this region, complete the drop off/pick up with the other parent at the airport, and then fly right back home. As another example, the parent might spend one night in a hotel before returning home.

You do not visit, go shopping, or do other activities in the community where you are dropping off/picking up the child. You only complete the drop off/pickup and return home as quickly as possible within 24 hours.

NOTE: The child who is not fully vaccinated must follow the requirements for visiting outlined in Section 2.2 of this document, including completing the [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#) form or having it completed on their behalf.

NOTE: If the parent who is not fully vaccinated stays in Nova Scotia longer than 24 hours, they must self-isolate. For example, a parent might drop off their child for a visit in Nova Scotia and stay in the province during the visit before picking up the child and leaving.

NOTE: If the parent who is not fully vaccinated brings another child who is not fully vaccinated and who is not part of the custody visit and they stay in Nova Scotia longer than 24 hours, both the parent and the child who is not part of the custody visit must self-isolate.

2.2 Travel for visiting a parent or child

Self-isolation is not required for a parent or child who lives in Nova Scotia and receives a visitor as described in this section. Isolation is also not required for their household members. As long as they have no symptoms, the Nova Scotia parent or child and their household members are free to carry on their regular routines.

When travel is for the purpose of visiting (rather than just dropping off or picking up a child), there are isolation requirements for the parent or child who is not fully vaccinated and travels.

To enter Nova Scotia, the parent must complete the [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#). They will receive a confirmation email which they must show to border officials when they arrive in Nova Scotia. Starting on their second day in the province, they will receive daily check-in emails to which they must respond.

The [Nova Scotia Safe Check-in](#) form must also be completed for a child. If a child under the age of 16 is traveling, one of the parents must complete the form on the child's behalf. Contact information for both parents must be submitted. Both parents will receive the confirmation email. Either the child or the parent traveling with the child must show the confirmation email to officials at the Nova Scotia border. The **parent who lives in Nova Scotia** must respond to the daily emails on their behalf.

People who are not fully vaccinated must do the modified form of self-isolation outlined in Section 2.3 of this protocol for at least seven days. They must have two negative test results in order to leave isolation after seven days. They must complete the full seven days, regardless of when they receive their test results. If they do not have their second negative test result after seven days, they must continue modified isolation until they get it. These requirements are the same whether it is an adult or a child who is traveling.

Testing must be done in Nova Scotia, not in advance of arrival. It must be a standard PCR lab test, not a rapid test. See more information about getting a test in Nova Scotia in Section 4 of this protocol.

Child custody travelers must be prepared to show their approval email to border officials. Starting on their second day in the province, each traveler will receive daily check-in emails to which they must respond. When it is a child who travels, the **parent who lives in Nova Scotia** must respond to the daily emails on a child's behalf.

Once a person has met their isolation obligations, they can unsubscribe from the daily check-in emails via the unsubscribe link in the email.

2.3 Modified self-isolation

As outlined above, child custody travelers who are not fully vaccinated are required to do a modified form of isolation for at least seven days and must get two negative test results to stop isolating after seven days. In addition, the parent or child should get tested for COVID-19 as outlined in Section 4 of this document. They must monitor their health closely and anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 must follow the testing directions in Section 4 of this document.

The modified form of self-isolation allows the following interaction with other people:

- A child can interact with people who live in the household they are visiting in Nova Scotia.
- A parent can stay/visit in the same household where their child lives in Nova Scotia and interact with people who live in that household.
- A parent can stay at a different location in Nova Scotia and their child can visit them there. The child can also go back and forth between their home and the place where the parent is staying.
- A parent or a child can interact with people who live in their own household when they return to Nova Scotia after a visit.
- Maintaining physical distance from household members is not necessary unless a parent or child becomes unwell. Household members do not need to self-isolate unless they become unwell. If anyone is unwell, they must get tested – see Section 4 of this document.

In addition, the parent or child is allowed to do the following during their modified self-isolation:

- Spend time outside on their own property or the property where they are visiting.
- Go for a drive.
- Go for a walk, run, hike, bike or ATV ride for exercise and recreation off their property. If they encounter people from outside their household, they must wear a mask and maintain a distance of 2 metres/6 feet.
- Visit a park, beach or other outdoor public space. If they encounter people from outside their household, they must wear a mask and maintain a distance of 2 metres/6 feet.
- Spend time at their cabin or vacation home (or a rental location) within the province, following the same rules as if at home.
- Drop off and pick up household members at school, work or recreational activities without getting out of the vehicle.
- Use contactless services to pick-up groceries or other items purchased online without getting out of the vehicle.
- Attend a drive-in theatre without getting out of the vehicle.
- Go through a drive-thru, such as at a restaurant or bank, and get self-serve gas.
- Attend necessary (urgent and routine) medical appointments. This includes appointments with physicians and nurse practitioners, dentists, optometrists and other regulated health professionals where in-person treatment is required.

The following activities are not allowed for the parent or child during their modified self-isolation:

- Going to a workplace, school, child care, or extracurricular activities.
- Entering public places (e.g. grocery stores, shopping malls, banks, religious institutions, restaurants/bars).
- Attending indoor and outdoor gatherings.
- Visiting people outside their household.
- Allowing people from outside their household (other than the parent or child they are visiting) to visit them on their property or in their home.
- Volunteering or working in any capacity that requires them to be in contact with people outside their household.

3.0 Child custody visits between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick

When a one-time or occasional child custody visit involves travel between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the travelers must follow the same rules as people coming from outside Atlantic Canada outlined in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 of this document.

However, recognizing that there are many custody agreements involving frequent travel between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, there are provisions for routine visits between these two provinces. This includes drop offs and pick ups that happen within 24 hours, as well as visits that happen on a regular, ongoing basis – such as every weekend, every second week or once a month.

People traveling between these two provinces for drop offs/pick ups or for routine visits do not need to complete the Nova Scotia Safe Check-in form. They should bring a copy of their custody agreement (whether it is legal/formal or informal) to show border officials if asked.

The public health measures outlined below only apply to parents and children who are not fully vaccinated and who travel for routine child custody visits between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Self-isolation upon arrival in Nova Scotia is not required if the following conditions can be met while a parent or child is visiting in New Brunswick or in Nova Scotia:

- Travel as directly as possible to the place where you will be staying, using contactless services for any stops (such as self-serve gas and drive-thrus for food or banking).
- If staying overnight or longer is necessary, the parent and child must isolate in their overnight accommodation.
- Parents and children over the age of 4 must wear a non-medical mask in any indoor public space other than their overnight accommodation.
- Parents have no close contact with anyone except their child(ren).
- Children can continue to attend school, child care or extracurricular activities.
- Monitor your health closely and if you start to feel sick, self-isolate and get tested. If you are in Nova Scotia, see Section 4 of this document for testing information.

When a parent or child returns to Nova Scotia after the type of visit described above, the parent or child should get tested for COVID-19 as outlined in Section 4 of this document. They can go to work, school or extracurricular activities but for 14 days, they must:

- Minimize close contact with other people.
- Avoid close contact with people at higher risk of developing complications from COVID-19 for 14 days. This includes people with underlying chronic or immunocompromising conditions, seniors, and people living in long-term care facilities or other congregate living settings.
- Avoid non-essential visitors in their home/accommodation.
- Avoid non-essential visits and trips outside their home/accommodation.
- Avoid large gatherings.
- Wear a [non-medical mask](#) in any indoor public space or when they are in close contact (less than 2 metres/6 feet) around other people in a private place outside of their home/accommodation.
- Monitor your health closely. Anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 must follow the directions in Section 4 of this document.

4.0 Testing

4.1 Testing when you have no symptoms

Testing for COVID-19 is strongly recommended for parents and for children age 4 and older who have traveled outside Atlantic Canada for visits related to child custody agreements outlined in Section 3 of this document.

NOTE: If a child who traveled is under the age of 4 or cannot be tested for any reason, the parent who lives in Nova Scotia should get tested instead.

When you come to Nova Scotia for a visit or when you return to Nova Scotia after a visit, you should get tested for COVID-19 three times. People can get a standard PCR lab test when their flight arrives at the Halifax Stanfield International Airport or by booking [COVID-19 tests](#) at testing sites around the province. The first test should be on day 1 or 2. If you are still in Nova Scotia, you should book the second test on day 6 or 7 and the third test on day 12, 13 or 14. If you can't book the tests online, you can contact 811.

There is no cost for testing. It is not mandatory but it is strongly recommended, even if you show no signs of illness.

Testing is only required if you are not fully vaccinated and you wish to stop isolating earlier than 14 days. Testing for this purpose must be done in Nova Scotia, not in advance of arrival. It must be a standard PCR lab test which takes up to 72 hours to be processed in Nova Scotia. It cannot be a rapid test which gives a result in minutes.

A negative test result does not give 100% certainty that a person does not have COVID-19. However, testing is an added layer of protection because a negative result is a good indication that the person is not likely carrying and transmitting the virus unknowingly.

4.2 Testing when you have symptoms

Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 must complete the online assessment, book a [COVID-19 test](#), and follow the isolation directions provided. Even if you only have one mild symptom, you need to get tested. If you can't book the test online, you can call 811.

People who have only one mild symptom, other than fever or new or worsening cough, do not have to isolate while waiting for their test and results, unless they are still doing isolation required after travel.

5.0 Custody arrangements with symptoms or diagnosis

5.1 Parent has symptoms or is diagnosed with COVID-19

If the parent can isolate completely apart from the rest of the household and there is another caregiver in the home who can transport the child back and forth between homes, the custody arrangement can continue uninterrupted.

However, if the parent is the only caregiver in the home, then there are two options outlined below. If the parents cannot mutually agree on one option or the other, then Option 1 is the default that they must adhere to.

Option 1: The parents can agree to form a “double bubble” with their two households. The parents can continue to transport the child back and forth as long as both households self-isolate. The isolation ends when the parent with symptoms has received a negative test result or has been told by the Public Health staff managing the parent’s case and any related cases that isolation can end.

Option 2: The parents can agree that the child remains in the household where they were when the parent developed symptoms or received a positive test result. Everyone in the household with the parent who has symptoms or COVID-19 must isolate. The custody agreement would not resume until the parent with symptoms has received a negative test result or has been told by the Public Health staff managing the parent’s case and any related cases that isolation can end.

5.2 Child has symptoms or is diagnosed with COVID-19

There are two options outlined below. If the parents cannot mutually agree on one option or the other, then Option 1 is the default that they must adhere to.

Option 1: The parents can agree to form a “double bubble” with their two households. The parents can continue to transport the child back and forth as long as both households self-isolate. The isolation ends when the child has received a negative test result or has been told by the Public Health staff managing the child’s case and any related cases that isolation can end.

Option 2: The parents can agree that the child remains in the household where they were when they developed symptoms. If the child cannot isolate completely alone, then the parent must also isolate with the child. If there is only one caregiver in the home, then the entire home must isolate.

If there is a second caregiver, then the rest of the household does not have to isolate as long as the parent and child are able to isolate in a separate space and the only shared living space they have with the rest of the household is a bathroom that is cleaned after each use. Cleaning includes high touch surfaces like doorknobs, taps, toilet handle and sink.

The custody agreement would not resume until the child has received a negative test result or has been told by the Public Health staff managing the child’s case and any related cases that isolation can end.