

# Questions and Answers for Patients: Administration of Second Doses for Individuals who received First Dose of AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD COVID-19 Vaccines in Ontario Pharmacies

May 21, 2021

This Questions and Answers document provides information to patients on the second dose administration of the AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine.

**1. Can I receive my second dose of AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine earlier than 12 weeks if I didn't receive the first dose during the period March 10<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>?**

No, not at this time. Currently, based on the guidance provided by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, only those individuals who received their first dose of the AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine during the period between March 10<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> are eligible to receive a second dose of the same vaccine earlier than 12 weeks if they so choose.

If patients choose to wait until more is known about the safety and efficacy of mixing vaccine products in a series, they may choose to: 1) receive a second dose AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine at that time ( $\geq 12$  weeks) or 2) if proven to be a safe and effective option, have a second dose of one of the mRNA vaccines. A second dose of an mRNA vaccine would be scheduled at an interval of 16 weeks from their first dose.

Based on emerging evidence of the protection provided by the first dose of a two dose series for COVID-19 vaccines currently authorized in Canada, the National Advisory Committee for Immunization ([NACI](#)) recommends that in the context of limited COVID-19 vaccine supply jurisdictions should maximize the number of individuals benefiting from the first dose of vaccine by extending the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine up to four months after the first.

**2. Why did the government pause the first dose administration of the AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine? Is it safe?**

Effective May 11, 2021, Ontario paused the rollout and administration of first doses of AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine. This decision was made out of an abundance of caution due to the increase in the rare blood clotting condition, known as vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT) or Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), linked to the vaccine. Although the risk of this serious side effect is rare, patients should still be aware of [symptoms](#) to watch out for.

Based on the much higher risks of COVID-19 infection recently observed in Ontario including hospitalization, serious illness and death, those who received their first dose with the AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine did absolutely the right thing to prevent illness, and to protect their families, loved ones and communities.

**3. Is the AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine as effective if given before the 12 or 16 week interval?**

Data from clinical trials have demonstrated optimal vaccine efficacy of the AstraZeneca vaccine when the interval between the first and second doses was  $\geq 12$  weeks (estimated at over 80%)\* compared to shorter intervals (estimated at 69% for the interval of 9-12 weeks)\* ([\\*NACI, Appendix C: Table 9](#))

**4. Can I receive another COVID-19 vaccine as my second dose?**

At this time, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) is not recommending that vaccines of different types (e.g., mRNA vaccine and viral vector vaccine) be used in the same series as data on the immune response following mixed vaccine schedules are not currently available. However, a clinical trial is underway that is addressing this question with final results anticipated to be available in June 2021.

In collaboration with health experts at Public Health Ontario, the Science Advisory Table and the federal, provincial and territorial partners, the government is reviewing the data to consider options for the use of the AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD vaccine or an mRNA vaccine for second doses. More information will be provided in the coming days.

**5. Where can I get more information?**

For more information related to COVID-19 and the service of vaccine immunization, talk to your health care provider or visit the following:

**COVID-19 vaccines for Ontario:** <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-ontario>