

# Updated: Questions and Answers for Patients: COVID-19 Vaccine Immunization through Ontario Pharmacies

This Questions and Answers document provides information to patients on the availability of COVID-19 Vaccine Immunization through Ontario pharmacies.

**Effective March 10, 2021**, the Government of Ontario is publicly funding COVID-19 vaccines for immunization at participating pharmacies in Ontario.

## **1. Who can get a COVID-19 vaccine at a pharmacy?**

Individuals in Ontario may be eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at a participating pharmacy. Eligibility criteria is expected to change as COVID-19 vaccine supply becomes available.

Please refer to the [ministry website](#) for the most recent Executive Officer Notice entitled “Administration of the Publicly Funded COVID-19 Vaccines in Ontario Pharmacies – Eligibility”.

## **2. How do I know if I belong to a priority group targeted for COVID-19 vaccination?**

Priority populations are identified based on current public health guidelines and considerations and may change as the pandemic situation evolves. Please contact your local [public health unit](#) and visit the ministry’s website [COVID-19 vaccines for Ontario COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) in Ontario](#) for up-to-date information on who is eligible.

Please also access the Ontario Government [website](#) for updates to the provincial rollout and population priority groups.

## **3. Which pharmacy can provide me with the COVID-19 vaccine?**

You can locate a participating pharmacy at [this link](#).

Please call ahead to the pharmacy to find out their booking procedures as some pharmacies may only administer vaccines by pre-booked appointment; while other pharmacies may choose to offer walk-in appointments.

**4. What do I need to bring with me to the pharmacy to get my COVID-19 vaccine?**

When you go to the pharmacy, you should provide a valid Ontario health card number. If you do not have an Ontario health card number, you may still receive a publicly funded COVID-19 vaccine using an alternate identification and providing your date of birth and contact information to the pharmacy.

Other forms of patient identification may include:

- Birth Certificate
- First Nations ID
- Passport
- MRN (Medical Record Number)
- Out of Province ID
- Driver's Licence

If arriving to the pharmacy for your second dose, it is recommended that you bring your Ministry of Health COVID-19 vaccine receipt that you would have received after receiving your first dose.

**5. If I received a first dose (or both doses) of a vaccine outside of Ontario or Canada, am I considered fully vaccinated?**

In Ontario, an individual is considered fully vaccinated if they have received:

- The full series of a COVID-19 vaccine authorized by Health Canada, or any combination of such vaccines,
- One or two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada, followed by one dose of a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine authorized by Health Canada, or
- Three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada; and
- They received their final dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at least 14 days ago.

Individuals who received a COVID-19 vaccine outside of Ontario or Canada are required to provide proof, such as a vaccination receipt or certificate, to their [public health unit](#) in order to be registered in the system.

Once that process is complete, if an additional dose is required, these individuals will be able to book their subsequent dose appointment through the provincial booking system, public health units that use their own booking system or participating pharmacies and primary care settings at an interval that aligns with Ontario's vaccine strategy.

Individuals who received a COVID-19 vaccine outside of Ontario or Canada who contact their local Public Health Unit will have their COVID-19 vaccine history verified and uploaded into the COVAX system. Depending on how many doses and which vaccines were previously administered (please refer to the [COVID-19 Guidance for Individuals Vaccinated outside of Ontario/Canada](#) located on the ministry's [website](#)), pharmacies may administer

an additional dose of an mRNA vaccine if required to complete the vaccine series, in alignment with the ministry's guidance "[Who is considered to be fully vaccinated in Ontario](#)".

## **6. Which COVID-19 vaccine is being offered at pharmacies?**

For the publicly funded COVID-19 vaccine immunization, pharmacists will be providing the COVID-19 vaccine that is available according to the provincial vaccine rollout plan.

For more information about COVID-19 vaccines, please refer to Public Health Ontario's website at this [link](#) and the ministry's COVID-19 Vaccine Information Sheet at this [link](#).

## **7. Are pharmacists prepared to provide COVID-19 vaccines? What quality standards will be followed?**

Pharmacists, registered pharmacy students, interns and pharmacy technicians are authorized to administer the COVID-19 vaccine provided they have the appropriate injection training, have registered this training with the Ontario College of Pharmacists (OCP), and are working at a pharmacy that has entered into an agreement with the Ministry of Health to provide COVID-19 vaccines.

## **8. What happens before and after the vaccination at the pharmacy?**

The pharmacist will provide details on the process before the COVID-19 vaccine immunization begins, as well as answer any other questions you may have.

Patients, or their substitute decision-makers, will be required to provide consent for the COVID-19 vaccine administration and related data collection. Pharmacy staff will provide you with written vaccine information and after-care instructions as well as a written receipt with the pharmacy contact information that you received the vaccine, including a scheduled time and date and instructions for your second dose, if applicable, a pharmacy may also provide an electronic receipt containing this information .

**Individuals must keep their receipt for their vaccination in a safe place and bring it to their appointment for the second dose of the vaccine.**

Patients are asked to wait for 15 minutes after receiving their vaccine to ensure they are feeling well. Longer waiting times of 30 minutes may be recommended if there is a concern about a possible vaccine allergy or adverse event following injection (AEFI).

Individuals are advised to continue to follow the recommendation of public health officials to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which include wearing a mask, staying at least 2 meters from others and limiting/avoiding contact with others outside their household.

## **9. What happens after receiving the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine?**

After the first dose, the pharmacy will schedule an appointment for your second dose. Individuals are strongly advised to return to the same pharmacy location for their second dose and follow the instructions provided by their pharmacist to ensure they receive the second dose at the right time. The pharmacy will contact you should there be a need to reschedule the appointment for a later date for reasons such as vaccine supply.

- Individuals who received the Moderna vaccine may be directed to return 4 to 16 weeks after receiving the first dose depending on the availability of the vaccine and the province's schedule for accelerated second doses.
- Individuals who received the Pfizer vaccine may be directed to return 3 to 16 weeks after receiving the first dose depending on the availability of the vaccine and the province's schedule for accelerated second doses.
- Individuals who received the AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD vaccine may be directed to return at least 8 weeks after receiving the first dose depending on the availability of vaccines unless they are eligible for an accelerated dosing interval.

Note: At this time, the Province has a limited supply of AstraZeneca / COVISHIELD vaccine. Please refer to Q11 for information on second doses with an mRNA vaccine.

Patients can refer to the ministry's [COVID-19 Vaccine Information Sheet](#) for more information on each vaccine.

#### **10. What if I cannot make it on the day of my scheduled second dose?**

If you need to reschedule the arrangements made for the second dose, please contact the pharmacy as soon as possible for scheduling an alternate day/time.

The pharmacy staff is required to schedule the second dose (if applicable) and give you instructions on how you can reach them, as well as how they will reach you should there be a need to reschedule due to issues such as vaccine supply.

#### **11. My first dose was an AstraZeneca vaccine which is no longer available for first dose administration. What should I do about my second dose?**

If your first dose was the AstraZeneca or COVISHIELD vaccine at the pharmacy, please contact the pharmacy for information on your second dose.

Individuals who received their first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine are eligible to receive a second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine at an interval of at least 8 weeks unless they are eligible for an accelerated dosing interval.

Individuals who received their first dose of AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine and choose to receive one of the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna) as their second dose (unless there is a contraindication) may receive their second dose at an interval of at least 8 weeks, unless they qualify for an accelerated dosing interval, depending on supply. Please refer to

the ministry website for the most recent EO Notice entitled “Administration of the Publicly Funded COVID-19 Vaccines in Ontario Pharmacies – Eligibility” for further information about eligibility criteria for second doses administered in pharmacies, including vaccine mixing.

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

Yes. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) is now [recommending](#) the interchangeability of vaccines (or vaccine mixing) which means a patient could receive one vaccine product for the first dose and a different vaccine product for the second dose to complete the two-dose vaccine series.

Individuals who have received only their first dose of the Astra Zeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine and who have not yet received a second dose can choose to either receive a second dose of the AstraZeneca/ COVISHIELD vaccine, or to receive an mRNA (Pfizer or Moderna) vaccine for their second dose.

Individuals who received a first dose of an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna) should be offered the same mRNA vaccine for their second dose. If the same mRNA vaccine is not readily available\* or unknown, another mRNA vaccine can be considered interchangeable and should be offered to complete the vaccine series. Note: An mRNA vaccine followed by a second AstraZeneca vaccine is not an acceptable interchangeable vaccine series (subject to limited exceptions where an individual has an AEFI or allergy<sup>1</sup>).

\*Note, readily available means easily available at the time of vaccination without delay or vaccine wastage

Please refer to the [ministry website](#) for the most recent EO Notice entitled “Administration of the Publicly Funded COVID-19 Vaccines in Ontario Pharmacies – **Eligibility**” for further information about eligibility criteria for second doses administered in pharmacies, including vaccine mixing.

### **13. What should I do about my second dose if my first dose was an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna)?**

Individuals who received their first dose of either Pfizer or Moderna may see an accelerated interval for receiving their second dose with Pfizer or Moderna depending on certain eligibility criteria and dates. Other considerations may apply for individuals who have an AEFI or allergy to an mRNA vaccine. <sup>2</sup> Please contact your pharmacy for further information.

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the [ministry website](#) for the most recent EO Notice entitled “Administration of the Publicly Funded COVID-19 Vaccines in Ontario Pharmacies – Eligibility”.

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to the [ministry website](#) for the most recent EO Notice entitled “Administration of the Publicly Funded COVID-19 Vaccines in Ontario Pharmacies – Eligibility”.

Individuals are likely to be offered the same mRNA vaccine for their second dose, however they are able to receive either Pfizer or Moderna as their second dose. The preferential recommendation for individuals age 18 – 24 years of age is for the use of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as it appears to be associated with a lower rate of myocarditis / pericarditis in this age group compared to the Moderna vaccine. In addition, Ontario recommends the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for youth ages 12-17 (including those turning 12 in 2021) despite Health Canada authorizing the use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine for ages 12 and over. This preferential recommendation stems from the fact that there is more experience to date with this vaccine in this age group, and there is the possibility of a lower rate of myocarditis and/or pericarditis with Pfizer-BioNTech in this age group.

Note: While individuals age 12 to 24 are eligible to receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, Ontario recommends using the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for ages 12-24 (including those turning 12 in 2021). Informed consent is required for those age 12 to 24 who wish to receive the Moderna vaccine, as it is whenever a pharmacy administers a vaccine.

The anticipated schedule for eligibility to book a second dose appointment based on confirmed supply is available on the ministry [website](#).

For more information about the administration of second doses in pharmacies please refer to the [ministry website](#) for the most recent EO Notice entitled “Administration of the Publicly Funded COVID-19 Vaccines in Ontario Pharmacies – **Eligibility**”

**14. Am I able to re-schedule my second dose based on the Ministry’s announcements about accelerating second doses for individuals who received first doses with an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna)?**

Yes. Individuals who are eligible for an accelerated second dose may wish to contact their pharmacy, where they received their first dose to book (or re-book) an appointment for their second dose. Or, individuals may access the [provincial booking system](#) to search for another pharmacy that is offering the specific vaccine for their second dose. Second doses can also be booked at other locations (without a first appointment) in the provincial booking system.

If individuals are booking an appointment at a different pharmacy, they are reminded to cancel any previously scheduled doses that they may have already booked either with the other pharmacy or through the provincial booking system.

**15. I am a resident living in a retirement home or congregate setting. Can I get a third dose at a pharmacy?**

At this time, as [announced](#) by the ministry, if you are a resident living in a retirement home or aged 65 years or older and living in a congregate setting (e.g. assisted-living facilities, naturally occurring congregate retirement settings/seniors apartment buildings, etc.). you may be eligible for a 3<sup>rd</sup> dose of a mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if at least 5 months has

passed since receiving your second dose and the vaccine is administered at the retirement home or congregate setting. The retirement home or congregate setting in collaboration with the public health unit and a community pharmacy will coordinate administration of 3<sup>rd</sup> dose vaccines to these residents.

Eligible residents would not be attending the pharmacy for the 3<sup>rd</sup> dose as it is expected that the dose would be administered in the retirement home or congregate setting as described.

### **16. I am a resident living in a long-term care home. Can I get a third dose at a pharmacy?**

At this time, as [announced](#) by the ministry, if you are a resident living in a **long-term care home (LTC)** you may be eligible for a 3<sup>rd</sup> dose of a mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if at least 5 months has passed since receiving your second dose and the vaccine is administered at the LTC home. The LTC Home in collaboration with the public health unit and a community pharmacy will coordinate administration of 3<sup>rd</sup> dose vaccines to these residents.

Eligible residents of LTC Home would not be attending the pharmacy for the 3<sup>rd</sup> dose as it is expected that the dose would be administered in the LTC Home as described.

### **17. I am an immunocompromised patient. Can I get a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a pharmacy?**

Yes. Pharmacies may provide a 3<sup>rd</sup> dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to certain patients who are immunocompromised provided they give the pharmacy a copy of the referral letter from their health care provider. Alternatively, you can present a recent prescription label or prescription receipt to the pharmacy, or the pharmacy can refer to your medication profile, and cross-reference the medication shown on those documents with the list of immunosuppressive medications that qualifies individuals to receive a third dose.

If you present a prescription of a medication that is not listed on the [COVID-19 Vaccine 3<sup>rd</sup> Dose Recommendation guidance](#), you may be directed to your health care provider to receive a referral form/letter for a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

As [announced](#) by the ministry, if you are in one of the immunocompromised population groups identified by the ministry, you are eligible for a 3<sup>rd</sup> dose. The groups include:

- Individuals receiving active<sup>3</sup> treatment (e.g., chemotherapy, targeted therapies, immunotherapy) for solid tumour or hematologic malignancies

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<sup>3</sup> Active treatment includes patients who have completed treatment within 3 months. Active treatment is defined as chemotherapy, targeted therapies, immunotherapy, and excludes individuals receiving therapy that

- Recipients of solid-organ transplant and taking immunosuppressive therapy
- Recipients of chimeric antigen receptor (CAR)-T-cell therapy or hematopoietic stem cell transplant (within 2 years of transplantation or taking immunosuppression therapy).
- Individuals with moderate to severe primary immunodeficiency (e.g., DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome).
- Individuals with stage 3 or advanced untreated HIV infection and those with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.
- Individuals receiving active treatment with the following categories of immunosuppressive therapies: anti-B cell therapies<sup>4</sup> (monoclonal antibodies targeting CD19, CD20 and CD22), high-dose systemic corticosteroids (refer to the [Canadian Immunization Guide](#) for suggested definition of high dose steroids), alkylating agents, antimetabolites, or tumor-necrosis factor (TNF) inhibitors and other biologic agents that are significantly immunosuppressive.

Individuals in the above identified immunocompromised population groups can receive their third dose if at least 2 months have passed since receiving their second dose or at an interval of at least 28 days as directed by their health care provider. As noted, a referral letter from the health care provider is required for administration of the third vaccine dose in the pharmacy. Alternatively, you can ask your pharmacist to check your medication profile or you can present a prescription label or receipt to the pharmacy to see if you qualify.

**18. Can I get my COVID-19 vaccine at or around the same time as the flu vaccine?**

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccines may be given with, or at any time before or after, other vaccines, including the influenza vaccine. If given by injection at the same time as the flu vaccine, separate limbs should be used if possible. Alternatively, the injections may be administered into the same muscle separated by at least 2.5 cm (1”). Different immunization equipment (needle and syringe) must be used for each vaccine.

Please see the [guidance](#) provided by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.

This is not medical advice. Please speak to your health care provider for information about your situation.

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

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does not suppress the immune system (e.g. solely hormonal therapy or radiation therapy). See Ontario Health/Cancer Care Ontario's [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

<sup>4</sup> Active treatment for patients receiving B-cell depleting therapy includes patients who have completed treatment within 12 months

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

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

**COVID-19 vaccine information:** [www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/vaccines](http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/vaccines)

**COVID-19 Resources:** [www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/public-resources](http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/public-resources)