

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 who live, work or study in Ontario or are here for an extended stay 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. Questions intentionally deleted as of November 3, 2021 update. How do I know if I belong to a priority group targeted for COVID-19 vaccination?

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 subsequent 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.

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 appointment?

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

The pharmacy staff is required to schedule second dose appointments (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 AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine should receive one of the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna) as their second dose (unless there is a contraindication) and 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 should receive an mRNA (Pfizer or Moderna) vaccine for their second dose unless contraindicated.

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 allergy¹).

*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.² Please contact your pharmacy for further information.

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**”

¹ 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”.

² 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. What is the difference between a third dose and a booster dose?

The intent of a **booster dose** is to restore protection that may have decreased over time to a level that is no longer deemed sufficient in individuals who initially responded adequately to a complete primary vaccine series. This is distinguished from the intent of a **third dose** which might be added to the standard primary vaccine series with the aim of enhancing the immune response and establishing an adequate level of protection for individuals who developed no or sub-optimal immune response to a 2-dose primary series.

16. I am a resident living in a retirement home or congregate setting. Can I get a booster 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, congregate settings for people with developmental disabilities, mental health and addictions issues, etc.), you may be eligible for a booster dose of a mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if at least 6 months (168 days) have 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 booster doses to these residents.

Eligible residents would not be attending the pharmacy for the booster dose as it is expected that the dose would be administered in the retirement home or congregate setting as described.

17. I am a resident living in a long-term care home. Can I get a booster 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 booster dose of a mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if at least 6 months (168 days) have 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 booster vaccines to these residents.

Eligible residents of LTC Home would not be attending the pharmacy for the booster dose as it is expected that the dose would be administered in the LTC Home as described.

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

Yes. Pharmacies may provide a third dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine to certain patients who are immunocompromised provided they give the pharmacy a copy of a 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 3rd 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 3rd dose. The groups include:

- Individuals receiving active³ treatment (e.g., chemotherapy, targeted therapies, immunotherapy) for solid tumour or hematologic malignancies
- 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.

³ 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 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.

- Individuals receiving active treatment with the following categories of immunosuppressive therapies: anti-B cell therapies⁴ (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 (56 days) 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.

19. Are COVID-19 booster doses being offered to any groups in the community?

Yes. In addition to specific immunocompromised patient groups, residents of Long-Term Care (LTC) Homes, Retirement Homes and Elderly (those 65 years of age and older) who are living in other congregate settings, there are also other community groups who are eligible for booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine using an mRNA vaccine (i.e., Moderna or Pfizer) unless contraindicated. These community groups include:

- Elderly (those 70 years of age and older, born in 1951 or earlier) living in the community if at least 6 months (168 days) have passed since receiving their second dose.
- Health Care Workers who received their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, if at least 6 months (168 days) have passed since receiving their second dose.
Health Care Workers^[1] include:
 - Any [regulated health professionals](#) and any staff member, contract worker, student/trainee, registered volunteer, or other designated essential caregiver currently working in-person in a health care organization, including workers that are not providing direct patient care and are frequently in the patient environment (i.e. cleaning staff, research staff, other administrative staff).
 - Workers providing health care service or direct patient service in a congregate, residential or community setting outside of a health care organization.

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

^[1] Refer to the complete list of Healthcare workers in the COVID-19 3rd Dose Recommendations [Guidance Document](#)

- All First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals, and non-Indigenous individuals who share a household with a First Nations, Inuit and Métis individual, if at least 6 months (168 days) have passed since receiving their second dose.
- Individuals who received two doses of either the AstraZeneca or COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine (i.e. a Viral Vector Vaccine Series) if at least 6 months (168 days) have passed since receiving their second dose.
- Individuals who received one dose of the Janssen / Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine (i.e. a Viral Vector Vaccine Series), if at least 6 months (168 days) have passed since receiving their first dose.

Note: To meet the eligibility requirements for a COVID-19 booster dose, the pharmacy may ask whether you are part of one of the above non-age-based community groups. Your self-attestation is sufficient evidence of your eligibility. In addition, if you are a health care worker you can present your employment badge to the pharmacy. For anyone who received a Janssen / Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine or another COVID-19 vaccine not supplied in Canada, the pharmacy will verify your status in the COVAX_{ON} system.

20. Are individuals who are eligible to receive a third or booster dose receiving the full dose?

Ontario recommends that residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes, elderly (65 years of age and older) living in other congregate living settings and immunocompromised individuals receive the full dose of either Moderna (100 mcg) or Pfizer-BioNTech (30 mcg) for a third or booster dose.

For individuals in all other population groups eligible for a booster dose as set out in Question 19, the following dosages are recommended for the booster dose:

- Moderna: the full dose (100 mcg) is recommended for adults 70 years of age and older, while a half dose (50 mcg) is recommended for those less than 70 years of age.
- Pfizer-BioNTech: the full dose (30 mcg) is recommended for all booster doses.⁵

21. 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

⁵ See [NACI's recommendation](#) and the Ministry's 3rd Dose Recommendation [Guidance](#) for more details.

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.

22. 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 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

COVID-19 Resources: www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/public-resources