

# 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. For all vaccine doses, when eligibility is defined by age, individuals must be the respective age of eligibility on the day of the vaccine administration.

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 more than one dose) 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 by 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.

As of November 25, 2021, pharmacies are administering COVID-19 mRNA vaccines, namely, the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine (12+ formulation for ages 12+, and pediatric formulation for ages 5 – 11) as well as the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. Refer to Q # 13 & 14 for more details on age criteria.

Viral vector COVID-19 vaccines such as AstraZeneca or Janssen COVID-19 vaccine (Johnson & Johnson) are available in Ontario in minimal quantities and managed by local public health units. They will only be offered to those who decline an mRNA vaccine or have contraindications with mRNA vaccines, with informed consent.

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 vaccine is administered by 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). Note: This wait time may be shorter for booster doses if previous doses showed no AEFI concerns.

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. For a multi-dose vaccine series, 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 or discontinuation of a 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 by 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 [12+ formulation] or Moderna) as their second dose (unless there is a contraindication) and should receive their second dose at an interval of at least 8 weeks. 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. For a multi-dose vaccine series, 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 (12+ formulation 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 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. Which of the Pfizer vaccines (12 + formulation or pediatric formulation for ages 5 to 11) is recommended for children who are 11 years of age and turning 12 by the time they are eligible for their second dose?**

Children who received the Pediatric Pfizer vaccine (10mcg) for their first dose and who have turned 12 by the time the second dose is due (i.e. 8 weeks after their first dose) may receive the Pfizer vaccine (12+ formulation with 30mcg) that is authorized for individuals age 12 and over to complete their primary series.

**14. For a multi-dose vaccine series, what should I do about my second dose if I am 12 years of age or older and my first dose was an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna)?**

Individuals who received their first dose of either Pfizer (12+ formulation) or Moderna may have seen an accelerated interval for receiving their second dose with Pfizer (12+ formulation) 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.

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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”.

Note that, as of November 25, 2021, the current interval between first and second doses is now recommended to be 8 weeks. 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 (12+ formulation) or Moderna as their second dose. Based on advice from the Ontario Immunization Advisory Committee, and in alignment with [NACI](#), the Ministry of Health has issued a **preferential recommendation for the use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for individuals 12-29**. This recommendation stems from an observed increase in the number of reports in Ontario of myocarditis/pericarditis following vaccination with Moderna relative to Pfizer-BioNTech in the 18-29 year old age group, particularly among males.

Note: While individuals age 12 to 29 are eligible to receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, Ontario recommends using the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine (12+ formulation) for ages 12 - 29. Informed consent is required for those age 12 to 29 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 is 8 weeks based on confirmed supply and 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**”

**15. For a multi-dose vaccine series, 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)?**

At this time, accelerated second doses is no longer recommended. There is emerging evidence that longer intervals between the first and second doses of COVID-19 vaccines result in more robust and durable immune response and higher vaccine effectiveness. See [NACI’s statement](#) for more information.

Note: Anyone, can get their second dose earlier than 8 weeks if needed, with informed consent.

Individuals who are eligible for a 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 at the recommended interval of 8 weeks. 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.

### **16. 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.

Note: the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine series involves a single dose. However, individuals who received the single dose Janssen vaccine are eligible for a supplementary or booster dose in accordance with the EO Notice entitled “Administration of the Publicly Funded COVID-19 Vaccines in Ontario Pharmacies – Eligibility”. References in the remainder of this document to individuals who have already received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine shall be interpreted to include individuals who received the single dose Janssen vaccine. In addition, for immunocompromised individuals who received the single dose Janssen vaccine, references in the remainder of this document to a third dose shall be interpreted to mean a second dose.

### **17. I am a resident living in a retirement home or other congregate setting. Can I get my vaccine dose at my place of residence?**

Yes, provided that you meet eligibility criteria for the vaccine, a pharmacy may administer your vaccine dose at your retirement home or other congregate setting. However, the retirement home or congregate setting in collaboration with the public health unit and the community pharmacy will need to coordinate the administration of any vaccine dose.

Pharmacy staff may also administer vaccine doses to staff, support workers, essential caregivers, volunteers, and contractors who are working at the retirement home or other congregate setting, provided that these individuals meet applicable eligibility criteria for the vaccine dose and pharmacy staff are on-site administering the vaccine to residents.

### **18. I am a resident living in a long-term care home. Can I get my vaccine dose at my long-term care home?**

Yes, provided that you meet eligibility criteria for the vaccine, a pharmacy may administer your vaccine dose at your long-term care home. However, the long-term care home in collaboration with the public health unit and the community pharmacy will need coordinate the administration of any vaccine dose.

Pharmacy staff may also administer vaccine doses to staff, support workers, essential caregivers, volunteers, and contractors who are working at the long-term care home, provided that these individuals meet applicable eligibility criteria for the vaccine dose and pharmacy staff are on-site administering the vaccine to residents.

### **19. 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 a COVID-19 vaccine to certain patients 5 years of age and older (or 18 years of age and older, in the case of viral vector vaccines for patients who have a contraindication to an mRNA vaccine) 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 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. For children ages 5-11 who are immunocompromised, the pediatric Pfizer-BioNTech (10mcg) vaccine should be given. The groups include:

- Individuals receiving dialysis (hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis)
- Individuals receiving active<sup>2</sup> 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 HIV with prior AIDS defining illness **or** prior CD4 count  $\leq$  200/mm<sup>3</sup> **or** prior CD4 fraction  $\leq$  15% **or** (in children 5-11 years) perinatally acquired HIV infection

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<sup>2</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 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 therapies<sup>3</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 (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.

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

Yes. Individuals who are 18 years of age and older are eligible for a booster dose, if at least 3 months (84 days) have passed since receiving their primary vaccine series with an mRNA or viral vector vaccine, including moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals who received a three-dose vaccine series.

Individuals who are 12 to 17 years of age are also eligible for a booster dose with an mRNA vaccine, if at least 6 months (168 days) have passed since receiving their primary vaccine series, including moderately to severely immunocompromised<sup>4</sup> individuals who received a three-dose vaccine series. Note: With informed consent, individuals aged 12 to 17 years may receive their booster dose in less than 6 months (168 days) as long as 3 months have passed since completing their primary COVID-19 vaccine series.

Pharmacies may administer a second booster (fourth dose) of an mRNA vaccine to residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes, Elder Care Lodges and elderly living in other congregate settings providing assisted-living and health services (see this [guidance document](#) for examples), if at least three months, or 84 days, have passed since the individual's first booster (third dose). At this time, immunocompromised individuals who have completed a three-dose series and received a first booster dose are not eligible for a second booster dose.

## **21. Are individuals who are eligible to receive a third or booster dose of an mRNA vaccine receiving the full dose?**

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<sup>3</sup> Active treatment for patients receiving B-cell depleting therapy includes patients who have completed treatment within 12 months

<sup>4</sup> Individuals (12 years of age and older) who were receiving active treatment necessitating a three dose primary series, are eligible for a booster dose, even if not receiving active treatment currently.

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 moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals receive the full dose of either Moderna (100 mcg) or Pfizer-BioNTech (12+ formulation) (30 mcg) for a third dose as part of a primary series<sup>5</sup> 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 (12+ formulation): the full dose (30 mcg) is recommended for all booster doses.<sup>6</sup>
- Pediatric Pfizer-BioNTech: a dose of (10mcg) should be given for third doses for eligible children ages 5-11 who are immunocompromised

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

The COVID-19 vaccines may be given with, or at any time before or after, other vaccines, including the influenza vaccine with the exception of children aged 5 – 11 years of age.

For children who are 5 – 11 years of age, it is recommended to wait for a period of at least 14 days BEFORE or AFTER the administration of another vaccine before administering a COVID-19 vaccine to prevent erroneous attribution of an AEFI to one particular vaccine or the other. However, this suggested minimum waiting period between vaccines is precautionary and therefore concomitant administration or a shortened interval between COVID-19 vaccines and other vaccines may be warranted on an individual basis in some circumstances. These include:

- when there is a risk of the individual being unable to complete an immunization series due to the limited access to health services or being unlikely to return at a later date;
- when an individual may not return to receive a seasonal influenza vaccine;
- when another vaccine is required for post-exposure prophylaxis;
- when individuals require accelerated vaccination schedules prior to immunosuppressive therapy or transplant; and
- at the clinical discretion of the healthcare provider

For those individuals who are eligible for co-administration, if given by injection at the same time, separate limbs should be used if possible. Alternatively, the injections may be

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<sup>5</sup> Moderately or severely immunocompromised adults receiving a booster dose after a primary series of three doses, are eligible to receive a total of four doses.

<sup>6</sup> See [NACI's recommendation](#) and the Ministry's 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 COVID-19 Vaccine Administration [guidance](#) for more information.

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

### **23. When is it recommended that an entire vaccine series be re-initiated?**

It is recommended that a re-vaccination with a repeat COVID-19 vaccine primary series (plus booster dose, if applicable) be initiated post-transplantation for hematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT), hematopoietic cell transplants (HCT) (autologous or allogeneic), and recipients of CAR-T-cell therapy given the loss of immunity following therapy or transplant.<sup>7</sup> [Optimal timing for re-immunization](#) should be determined on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the clinical team.

A re-vaccination series includes first, second, third and (if applicable) booster dose intervals based on a referral letter from a health care provider.

### **24. How long am I required to wait before getting my COVID-19 vaccine if I was infected with SARS-CoV-2?**

At this time, [NACI](#) recommends that individuals who have been infected with SARS-CoV-2 before starting or completing their primary vaccine series (i.e., after their first dose) may receive their first or next dose 8 weeks after symptoms have started or after testing positive (if no symptoms were experienced).

Individuals 12 years of age and older who are eligible<sup>8</sup> to receive a booster dose and who are infected with COVID-19 after their primary series (but before their booster dose), are recommended to receive their booster dose 3 months after symptom onset or positive test (if asymptomatic). As per [NACI](#), emerging evidence indicates that a longer interval between SARS-CoV-2 infection and vaccination is associated with improved antibody responses to COVID-19 vaccines. With informed consent, individuals may receive a booster dose once they are no longer infectious (asymptomatic and have completed their isolation) and are otherwise eligible for the booster dose.

### **25. 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:

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<sup>7</sup> As per the [Canadian Immunization Guideline](#), HSCT recipients should be viewed as vaccine naïve (i.e. never immunized) and require re-immunization after transplant.

<sup>8</sup> Individuals who are 12 to 17 years old are eligible to receive a booster dose if at least 6 months have passed since completing their primary vaccine series.

**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)