



Do I need a COVID booster? When should I get it?



We made this resource to explain the COVID-19 booster dose recommendations in Ontario. We also explain who is eligible for booster doses in Ontario. Advice and eligibility are different in different parts of Canada and the world.

Learn more from the Ontario Ministry of Health about "Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccines: recommended doses" and "COVID-19 Booster Recommendations" by visiting https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/COVID_19_vaccine_up_to_date.pdf and https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/COVID-19_vaccine_third_dose_recommendations.pdf.

Why are booster doses important?

COVID-19 booster doses are important for people 12 and older because they build back and strengthen protection. Two COVID vaccine doses give you important protection. But this protection drops over time and 2 doses do not protect as well against new variants.

Getting boosters will give you the best protection from:

- ✓ Getting COVID
- ✓ Spreading COVID
- ✓ Getting so sick from COVID that you have to go to hospital
- ✓ Dying from COVID

Getting boosters is common. For example, people get 4 vaccines for polio in the first 18 months of life and a tetanus vaccine booster is recommended every ten years.

How many vaccine doses do I need?

Knowing how many COVID-19 vaccine doses to get can be confusing. The number of recommended doses depends on your age, whether you live in a group setting, and whether you have a weakened immune system**. The Pfizer (Comirnaty™) and Moderna (Spikevax™) mRNA vaccines are preferred.

In Ontario, experts recommend:

- » Children 5 to 11 years should get 2 vaccine doses;
- » People 12 to 59 years should get 3 vaccine doses;
- » Adults 60 years and older should get 4 vaccine doses;
- » People living in long-term care homes, retirement homes, elder care lodges, and older people living in other congregate settings should get 4 vaccine doses;
- » 4 vaccine doses can be considered for First Nations, Inuit and Métis adults, and adults who live with them.
- » People of all ages who have a weakened immune system** should get an extra dose.

** Examples of individuals with weakened immune systems include people undergoing dialysis, being treated for cancer, organ transplant recipients, stem cell transplant recipients, those with genetic disorders that affect the immune system, those with advanced or untreated HIV, those receiving active treatment with high dose steroids, and people taking other medications that affect the immune system.

Health Canada has approved the Moderna vaccine for children 6 months to 5 years old. Read the NACI recommendations for this group here: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-moderna-spikevax-covid-19-vaccine-children-6-months-5-years.pdf> We don't have the Moderna vaccine for young children in Ontario yet.

Recommendations change as we learn more. Use the charts on pages 3 and 4 to figure out how many doses you can get in Ontario.

COVID-19 vaccine doses for people who do not have a weakened immune system**

	Initial doses		First booster	Second booster
	1st dose	2nd dose	3rd dose	4th dose
5 - 11	✓	✓		
12 - 17	✓	✓	✓	
Age 18+ and First Nations, Inuit or Métis or live with someone who is First Nations, Inuit, or Métis	✓	✓	✓	✓
18 - 59	✓	✓	✓	E
60+	✓	✓	✓	✓

** Examples of individuals with weakened immune systems include people undergoing dialysis, being treated for cancer, organ transplant recipients, stem cell transplant recipients, those with genetic disorders that affect the immune system, those with advanced or untreated HIV, those receiving active treatment with high dose steroids, and people taking other medications that affect the immune system.

✓ Recommended vaccine doses

E People in this group are eligible for second booster doses in Ontario as of July 14, 2022. Second booster doses have not been recommended for them yet. Recommendations may be different in other parts of Canada and around the world.

COVID-19 vaccine doses for people who have a weakened immune system**

Age	Initial doses			First booster	Second booster
	1st dose	2nd dose	3rd dose	4th dose	5th dose
5 - 11	✓	✓	✓		
12 - 17	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18+ and First Nations, Inuit or Métis or live with someone who is First Nations, Inuit, or Metis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18 - 59	✓	✓	✓	✓	E
60+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

** Examples of individuals with weakened immune systems include people undergoing dialysis, being treated for cancer, organ transplant recipients, stem cell transplant recipients, those with genetic disorders that affect the immune system, those with advanced or untreated HIV, those receiving active treatment with high dose steroids, and people taking other medications that affect the immune system.

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When can I get the first booster ?

You can get your first booster as soon as 3 months (84 days) after your second dose (or third dose if you have a weakened immune system). For people between 12 and 17 years old, waiting 6 months after your second dose (or third dose if you have a weakened immune system) is recommended. Longer spacing between vaccine doses will give you stronger, longer lasting protection.



When can I get the second booster?

If you are eligible, you can get a second booster as soon as 3 months (84 days) after your first booster. For most people, the second booster will be your fourth vaccine dose. It will be your fifth vaccine dose if you have a weakened immune system. In Ontario, people 18 years and older are advised to wait 5 months (140 days) to get a second booster.

What vaccines are recommended as booster doses?

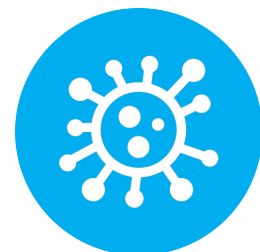
The Moderna and Pfizer COVID vaccines are recommended. They are safe and approved as boosters. They are both mRNA vaccines. Their ingredients are very similar, and they work in the same way. The Moderna vaccine contains a higher dose of mRNA than Pfizer. For most people who get a Moderna booster, the booster dose will be half the original dose.

It is safe and effective to mix and match Moderna and Pfizer vaccines to get all recommended doses. For people younger than 30, the Pfizer vaccine is preferred. This is because rare side effects called myocarditis and pericarditis have happened more after the Moderna vaccine, especially in younger males.

Booster doses of the Novavax (Nuvaxovid™) vaccine can be given to adults who may not receive mRNA vaccines. The Novavax vaccine is a protein subunit vaccine.

Do I still need boosters if I already had COVID?

Yes. You should get all recommended vaccine doses, even if you had a COVID infection. Getting all recommended vaccine doses will make sure you have the strongest, longest lasting protection.



It is safe to get a booster as soon as you are feeling better and your isolation period has ended. Experts recommend waiting 3 months after you had COVID to get a booster.

What if I'm pregnant?

Getting a COVID booster is especially important if you are pregnant. Getting COVID when you are pregnant can cause serious problems for you and your baby. A booster can prevent those complications and lower the risk of your newborn getting COVID.



I am between 18 and 59 years old. Should I get a second booster?

In Ontario, people between 18 and 59 can get a second booster, but second booster doses have not yet been recommended for this age group. You can get a second booster now, or wait until the fall. Here are some things to consider:

- » **Your risk of getting COVID-19:** If you are at higher risk of getting COVID-19, you may decide to get a second booster sooner. This includes people living and working in group settings, frontline healthcare workers and people who belong to racialized or marginalized groups hit hard by COVID-19. You may also be at higher risk if you work in a crowded setting, or are in contact with many people regularly.
- » **Your risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19:** If you are at higher risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19, you may decide to get a second booster sooner. Your risk of serious illness is higher if you are older, are pregnant or have an intellectual disability. It is higher if you have other health conditions (e.g. diabetes, kidney problems, heart problems), or have a weakened immune system.
- » **The risk of serious illness for people you live with or see often:** Vaccines lower the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19. If you live with or are in regular contact with someone who is at higher risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19, you may decide to get a second booster sooner.
- » **How much protection a second booster will give:** At this time, we don't know how much extra protection a second booster dose will give you. We don't know how long that protection will last.
- » **The possibility of new vaccines:** Newer vaccines that target the Omicron variants are being studied. We don't know when they will be available. We don't know what spacing between doses will be recommended.

Dr. Thomas Piggott, the Medical Officer of Health for Peterborough Public Health, made a video to help people between 18 and 59 think about second boosters. Watch the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqkdT1c7CMU&t=203s>

Speak to your family doctor if you would like advice for your situation.

Should I wait for new vaccines that target the Omicron variant?

New vaccines against the Omicron variant are being studied. We don't yet know how well these vaccines will work. We don't know if or when they will be available. We do know that current vaccines protect against serious illness and death. Getting all recommended doses as soon as possible will give you the best protection.

To learn more about COVID-19 boosters, visit <https://uwaterloo.ca/pharmacy/sites/ca.pharmacy/files/uploads/files/covid-19-boosters-faq.pdf>.

For the most up-to-date information about COVID boosters and booking appointments, visit <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/getting-covid-19-vaccine#who-can-get-vaccinated>. You may be able to get a booster at your pharmacy, your family doctor's office or at a public health clinic.

Remember: While COVID continues to be common in Ontario, there are things you can do to protect yourself and others.

- ✓ Get all vaccine doses that are recommended for you.
- ✓ If you feel sick, stay home.
- ✓ Wear a well-fitted mask in indoor public spaces.
- ✓ Gather outdoors whenever possible.
- ✓ Breathe clean air: open windows, keep the furnace fan "on", and use air filters