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## Spring COVID-19 Vaccine Recommended for Some High-Risk Groups, RSV Vaccine Campaign to End for This Season & Other Important Immunization Updates

**Attention:** Physicians, Nurse and Nurse Practitioners, Walk-In Clinics/Urgent Care Clinics, Family Health Teams, Ontario Health Teams, Infection Prevention & Control Practitioners, Long Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, Indigenous Health Care & Community, Ontario Health Central, Municipalities

**Date:** April 12, 2024

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### Spring COVID-19 Vaccine Dose Recommended for Some High-Risk Groups

The Ministry of Health (MOH) recently updated the [COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance](#). In alignment with the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), individuals who are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 may receive an additional dose of an XBB COVID-19 vaccine in spring 2024. The Ontario Spring COVID-19 vaccine campaign will run from April to June 2024. The Ministry of Health is recommending that the following individuals receive an additional dose this spring:

- Adults 65 years of age and older.
- Adult residents of long-term care homes and other congregate living settings for seniors.
- Individuals 6 months of age and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised (due to an underlying condition or treatment).
- Individuals 55 years and older who identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Metis and their non-Indigenous household members who are 55 years and older.

Receiving a COVID-19 vaccine in spring 2024 is particularly important for individuals at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 who did not receive a dose during the fall 2023 program. Eligible individuals may receive an XBB COVID-19 vaccine in spring 2024 if it has been the recommended 6 months (minimum 3 months) from their previous COVID-19 vaccine dose or known SARS-CoV-2 infection.

All other individuals are not currently recommended to receive a COVID-19 vaccine dose in spring 2024 and should wait until further MOH recommendations. This includes individuals who are not at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 who did not receive an XBB COVID-19 vaccine in fall 2023, unless they are specifically recommended to receive a dose by their health care provider.

Those who are eligible for a spring COVID-19 vaccine can access the vaccine through local pharmacies. People are encouraged to call their local pharmacy ahead of time to ensure vaccine availability. Pharmacies can now access Novavax vaccine, so if people are looking for that vaccine, they may be able

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to access through their local pharmacy as well. The health unit does have limited COVID-19 clinic capacity for those under 5 years of age or those seeking Novavax vaccine if they are unable to receive it at their local pharmacy. These two groups can call Health Connection to book a clinic appointment.

Health care providers, long term care homes and other health care facilities can order COVID-19 vaccine from the health unit using the [COVID-19 Vaccine Order form](#). If you have new staff requiring access and training for COVAX-ON, please email [covaxsupport@smdhu.org](mailto:covaxsupport@smdhu.org) and a health unit staff will follow up to provide details. Those with COVAX-ON accounts need to login monthly or their account will deactivate automatically. If you have staff with a COVAX-ON account that has become inactive, please email [covaxsupport@smdhu.org](mailto:covaxsupport@smdhu.org). Those who only need their password reset can contact the COVAX-ON Ministry support directly at 1-888-333-0640.

### **Legislative Exemptions for RNs & RPNs to Administer COVID-19 Vaccine Ending**

The College of Nurses recently shared with its members that as of March 31, 2024, legislative exemptions that allowed Registered Nurses (RNs) and Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) to administer the COVID-19 vaccine without an order have expired. The exemption, which was put into place in 2021, has only applied for nurses practicing in certain organizations that have an agreement with the Minister of Health related to administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. This means that as of Monday, April 1, 2024, RNs and RPNs will require a physician order or a medical directive to administer the COVID-19 vaccine.

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Exemptions Discontinued in Ontario**

New and renewed COVID-19 vaccine medical exemptions are no longer being recorded in Ontario's COVAX-ON vaccine information system. As existing medical exemptions on file expire, health unit staff are unable to renew them. If someone requires a medical exemption (such as for work or travel), they will need to follow up with their health care provider or their employer's occupational health and safety team for any necessary documentation.

### **End of High-Risk Adult RSV Vaccine Campaign for This Season**

With RSV activity decreasing and remaining below expected levels for this time of year the Ministry of Health has advised public health units that the high-risk adult RSV vaccination program should be discontinued at this time. If facilities have clinics already planned, do not cancel them. For facilities with open vials that have not reached the "use by date," these doses can continue to be administered to prevent wastage. For facilities with closed vials (outside of planned clinics), do not open a vial at this point for administration. Keep closed vials under cold chain for future use.

NACI guidance on RSV adult vaccination is expected this spring, and details on the 2024-25 RSV season and vaccination program will be provided closer to fall 2024.

### **New Format for 5 in 1 Vaccine for Infants - Switch from Pediacel® to Pentacel®**

The vaccine format for DTaP-IPV-Hib vaccine is being changed and you will now **need to reconstitute the vaccine prior to administration**. Pentacel® will come in 5 doses packs. Each pack will contain 5 vials of Quadracel® in liquid form and 5 vials of Act-Hib® in lyophilized powder form. You must reconstitute the Act-Hib® with the Quadracel® to ensure children get protection for all five antigens.

As our inventory of Pediacel® depletes, you will start to receive Pentacel®. The two products are equivalent and interchangeable in terms of vaccine doses and immune response and protection.

If you have any questions regarding the above information, please contact the Immunization Program at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 ext 8806.