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## **COVID-19 Vaccine: Update #36**

### **Updated 3<sup>rd</sup> Dose Recommendations, Extended Expiry Dates for Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, and Medical Exemptions**

**Attention:** Physicians, Emergency Departments, Hospital CEOs, Hospital Laboratories, Infection Control Practitioners, Occupational Health Practitioners, Walk-In Clinics/Urgent Care Clinics, Nurse and Nurse Practitioners, EMS, Designated Officers, Midwives, Family Health Teams, Pharmacies, Central LHIN, NSM LHIN, Beausoleil First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation, Rama First Nation, Wahta First Nation, Long-term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, Hospices, Coroners, Funeral Directors, Dentists, Group Homes, Homes for Special Care, Optometrists, Corrections, Municipalities, Licensed Child Care Providers

**Date:** September 15, 2021

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#### **Dose of mRNA Vaccine for Those Who Received Non-Health Canada Approved Vaccines**

Individuals who have received a 1 or 2-dose series of a COVID-19 vaccine that is not authorized for use by Health Canada should be offered 1 additional dose of mRNA vaccine. The minimum interval between the preceding dose and the additional dose should be 28 days.

If the individual has already received 3 doses of a non-Health Canada authorized COVID-19 vaccine at the appropriate interval, no additional doses are needed. Refer to Appendix A in the [Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance for Individuals Vaccinated outside of Ontario/Canada](#) for detailed schedules and recommendations.

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> Doses Recommended for Additional Moderately to Severely Immunocompromised People**

According to the recent [National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\) recommendation](#), some moderately to severely immunocompromised people are at increased risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19, and have demonstrated a sub-optimal immune response to a 2-dose vaccine series. Therefore, Ontario has revised their [COVID-19 Vaccine 3rd Dose Recommendations](#) offering them to the following groups, to complete an extended primary COVID-19 vaccine series:

- Individuals receiving active 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)



- Those with stage 3 or advanced untreated HIV infection and those with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
- Those undergoing active treatment with the following categories of immunosuppressive therapies: anti-B cell therapies (monoclonal antibodies targeting CD19, CD20 and CD22), high-dose systemic corticosteroids (defined as prednisone equivalent of greater than or equal to 2 mg/kg/day or 20 mg/day if weight is greater than 10 kg, for greater than or equal to 14 days), alkylating agents, antimetabolites, or tumor-necrosis factor (TNF) inhibitors and other biologic agents that are significantly immunosuppressive.

The Ontario recommended interval between the last dose of the initial primary series and the 3<sup>rd</sup> dose is at least 8 weeks. As per NACI, the minimum interval should be 28 days; however, an interval longer than the minimum 28 days between doses is likely to result in a better immune response. Exact timing should be decided with the treating provider to optimize the immune response from the vaccine series and minimize delays in management of the underlying condition.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Doses Recommended for Residents of Long-term Care and Higher Risk Retirement Homes**

The potential impact of the risk of transmission of the Delta variant of concern in vulnerable elderly populations who live in these high-risk settings has been assessed by the Ontario COVID-19 Vaccine Clinical Advisory Group, particularly in the context of emerging literature on the reduced immune response and the more rapid waning of antibody responses in this population. Vaccines have been effective against COVID-19 in Long Term Care Homes (LTCHs) in the 3-4 months after vaccination, but outbreaks are still occurring. In these outbreaks, some fully vaccinated residents are being infected, and although at a lower fatality rate, some have died.

We are working with all LTCHs, higher-risk retirement homes (Rhomes) identified by the Ministry of Health and Elder Care Lodges to ensure provision of 3<sup>rd</sup> doses to their residents before September 20<sup>th</sup> so as not to interfere with the annual influenza vaccine in October. The recommended interval for residents of LTCH, higher-risk Rhomes and Elder Care Lodges is at least 5 months after the second dose. This is consistent with the schedule of other vaccines that similarly utilize a 3<sup>rd</sup> dose to boost the immune response to a primary series. In order to maximize the boosting effect of the third dose in this group, it is recommended provincially to provide it close to or after the 5 month mark, but operationally in Simcoe Muskoka it is acceptable to give the vaccine at 4 to 5 months if needed.

### **Extended Expiry Date for Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine**

On August 27, 2021, Health Canada authorized an update to the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine Product Monograph to allow a 3-month extension to the expiry date for all Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine vials with expiry dates of August 2021 through February 2022 printed on the vial and carton labels. Based on this authorization, cartons and vials of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine with this expiry may remain in use for 3 months beyond the printed date as long as all approved storage conditions have been maintained.

### **COVID-19 Valid Medical Exemptions**

Some individuals may be seeking medical exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination, in regard to workplace vaccination policies and vaccine certificates to enter higher risk settings. The Ministry of Health released a document [Medical Exemptions to COVID-19 Vaccination](#) to assist physicians/specialists and NPs in

evaluating medical exemptions. In general, there are very few actual contraindications to available COVID-19 vaccines that would qualify as medical exemptions and most individuals can safely receive COVID-19 vaccines. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) has also released a [FAQ](#) to support physicians. A standard provincial medical exemption form template is going to be released in the coming days that doctors and nurse practitioners can use to provide proof of valid medical exemption to patients.

### **Vaccine Certificate Requirements in Higher Risk Settings**

Effective 12:01 a.m. on September 22, 2021, Ontario will require patrons to provide proof of identification and COVID-19 vaccination to access certain businesses and settings. A [FAQ](#) document was released to provide more specific information to the public and businesses about this program.

Between September 22 and October 22, 2021, in addition to proof of identity, a patron must show a paper or digital version of the PDF receipt of their proof of vaccination or their proof of medical exemption from their doctor or nurse practitioner.

The province is developing a digital version of the enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code that people will use to gain access to designated settings that will be launched on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. Paper copies of the PDF receipt will also continue to be an option as well.

People who have a green and white health card can access their proof of vaccination through the [provincial booking portal](#), or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900. People with red and white health cards can call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre to have their receipt emailed to them. Individuals who do not have a health card can contact the health unit at 705-721-7520 to verify their identity and have a COVID-19 ID/Personal Access Code issued. Individuals can then call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre to provide this COVID-19 ID to arrange to receive their vaccine receipt by email.

### **Workplace Immunization Policies**

While some medical facilities such as Primary Care are not included in [Directive 6](#) and were not included in the list of places covered by the [recently announced vaccine certificate mandate](#), the local Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Charles Gardner, has issued [strong recommendations](#) to employers in Simcoe Muskoka that they develop and implement COVID-19 vaccination policies for their respective workplace. Dr. Gardner has also issued a [Letter of Instruction](#) to all businesses and organizations outlining other workplace health and safety requirements.

### **Unvaccinated Patient Lists Now Available to Primary Care in Patient Enrollment Models**

A recent memo sent to all Primary Care Providers in Patient Enrollment Models announced that lists are now available via ONE ID accounts of any unvaccinated patients, in addition to the previously shared lists of vaccinated patients. The Ministry of Health and SMDHU continue to encourage primary care providers to contact unvaccinated patients if possible, as a trusted source to discuss vaccination.

### **For immunization program information, support materials and forms refer to our website**

[www.smdhu.org/pcportal](http://www.smdhu.org/pcportal) or call the Immunization program, Monday thru Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at 705-721-7520 or toll free 1-877-721-7520 ext. 8806.

### **Additional COVID-19 Vaccine Information**

For more information about the rollout of COVID-19 vaccine in our area, please refer to the SMDHU [COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunization](#) webpages.

For more information on the province's three-phased vaccine distribution implementation plan, please visit [COVID-19 vaccines for Ontario](#).

There are a number of COVID-19 resources and documents available through our Health Professional Portal at [www.smdhu.org/hpportal](http://www.smdhu.org/hpportal) as well as through [Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Government of Ontario](#).