

**COVID-19 Vaccine  
Bivalent Booster For 12+  
October 13, 2022**

**Questions and Answers:**

**1. Which bivalent vaccines are available?**

Both Moderna and Pfizer bivalent vaccines are now available in Ontario. However, the best bivalent dose is the first one offered to you.

With Health Canada approval of the Pfizer bivalent vaccine, everyone aged 12 and over are eligible to get a bivalent COVID-19 booster dose, if they have completed their primary COVID-19 vaccine series.

Health Canada has one of the most rigorous scientific review systems in the world and only approves a vaccine if it is safe, works and meets the highest manufacturing and quality standards.

**2. Why should I receive a COVID-19 vaccine? Is it still important to keep getting boosted?**

A challenging respiratory illness season is expected this fall and winter, with COVID-19, influenza and other viruses circulating. Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations remains the most important thing you can do to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community from severe illness and hospitalization.

COVID-19 vaccines help build immunity to the virus so that your body can fight it off more easily if you do become infected. Keeping up to date with vaccinations will provide strong protection against severe illness from COVID-19 and its variants, as evidence is showing that vaccine protection decreases over time

All Ontarians aged five years and older are eligible to receive a booster dose after completing their primary series. For most Ontarians under the age of 65 who are not immunocompromised, booster doses are recommended at a six-month interval.

Boosters are particularly important for individuals aged 65 and over, individuals who are moderately to severely immunocompromised, and other high-risk individuals. These individuals should receive the booster at an interval of three months since their previous dose to protect themselves during an expected challenging respiratory illness season.

**3. Who is now eligible to receive a booster dose?**

Ontarians aged five and over are eligible to receive a COVID-19 booster dose.

Infants and children aged six months to under five years are eligible for a primary series only. A booster dose is not approved for this age group.

**4. What is the interval to receive a COVID-19 booster dose?**

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Individuals aged 12 and older should receive a booster dose at a recommended interval of six months, or a minimum of three months, since their last dose; however, a six-month interval may provide better immune response.

Individuals belonging to the following groups are recommended to get their booster as soon as they are eligible (i.e., at an interval of three months), to protect themselves this fall as people spend more time indoors:

- individuals aged 65 and over;
- residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes, Elder Care Lodges, and individuals living in other congregate settings that provide assisted-living and health services;
- First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals and their non-Indigenous household members aged 18 and over;
- pregnant individuals aged 18 and over;
- health care workers aged 18 and over; and
- moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals aged 12 and over.

Individuals who have had COVID-19 are recommended to wait at least three months since the onset of symptoms or positive COVID-19 test before getting a booster; however, for some individuals, a six-month interval may provide better immune response.

**5. When and where will eligible Ontarians receive the COVID-19 booster?**

Appointments can be booked through the [COVID-19 vaccination portal](#) or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre (PVCC) at 1-833-943-3900. Eligible individuals can also book an appointment directly through public health units that use their own booking systems, Indigenous-led vaccination clinics, participating health care providers and [participating pharmacies](#).

To book an appointment between three and under six months since your last dose, please call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at [1-833-943-3900](tel:1-833-943-3900)) for public health units using the provincial booking system, or contact public health units that use their own booking systems, Indigenous-led vaccination clinics, participating health care providers and [participating pharmacies](#).

Long-term care, retirement home and Elder Care Lodge residents may receive their booster dose directly through the congregate home where they live.

**6. What is the bivalent COVID-19 vaccine? How is it different from the current COVID-19 vaccines available?**

Bivalent vaccines are a formulation that targets two different viruses or two strains of the same virus with one vaccine. The bivalent COVID-19 vaccine is an updated version of the COVID-19 vaccine, that targets the original COVID-19 virus and the Omicron variant, which is currently the dominant variant in circulation in Ontario.

Bivalent COVID-19 vaccines have been authorized by Health Canada for use only as a booster dose. Those who receive it must have already completed a primary series.

**7. Is the bivalent COVID-19 vaccine better than the original COVID-19 vaccine?**

All Health Canada approved vaccines provide lasting protection against severe outcomes from COVID-19.

The bivalent COVID-19 vaccine better protects against the most recently circulating COVID-19 variants in Ontario. That is why all COVID-19 vaccine booster dose appointments for Ontarians aged 12 years and older will be for the bivalent vaccine, which is the recommended booster.

As evidence shows that vaccine protection decreases over time, all Ontarians are encouraged to stay up to date with their vaccinations.

**8. Is one bivalent booster vaccine better than the other?**

If you are aged 18 years and older, the best bivalent dose is the first one offered to you.

If you are aged 12 to 17 years, you will receive the Pfizer bivalent vaccine as it is the only vaccine authorized for that age group.

Health Canada has one of the most rigorous scientific review systems in the world and only approves a vaccine if it is safe, works and meets the highest manufacturing and quality standards. Bivalent COVID-19 vaccines better protect against the most recently circulating COVID-19 variants in Ontario. Regardless of which Omicron subvariant is targeted by the bivalent vaccine, people aged 18 and older should get the first bivalent booster vaccine that is offered.

**9. Who is eligible to receive a bivalent booster?**

The bivalent COVID-19 booster will be widely available to any individual aged 12 and over by Monday, October 17.

**10. If I am aged 12 and over, can I get the bivalent vaccine as part of my primary vaccine series?**

Currently, the COVID-19 bivalent vaccine is only authorized for use as a booster dose. Eligible Ontarians will need to have completed a full primary series with the original vaccine before being able to receive the bivalent vaccine as a booster.

**11. When can children and youth aged five to under 12 expect to be eligible to receive a bivalent vaccine as their booster?**

Ontarians aged five and over are eligible to receive a COVID-19 booster dose. However, bivalent booster doses are currently only approved for individuals aged 12 and older.

**12. What are you doing to ensure children catch up on the non-COVID-19 immunization which saw a decrease in uptake throughout the pandemic?**

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The Ministry of Health has worked with public health units to understand the decrease in uptake and to promote catch up on routine and school-based vaccines. Starting in the summer, data from the provincial immunization repository has shown that administration of routine and school-based vaccines has gone above and beyond pre-pandemic levels, showing an encouraging trend that catch up activities are working.

**13. Is there an increased myocarditis risk with the bivalent vaccine?**

There is no known increased risk of myocarditis associated with the bivalent vaccine.

With the recent authorization of Pfizer's bivalent vaccine, individuals aged 12 to 17 years old will receive the Pfizer bivalent vaccine. In accordance with the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), there is no preference between Moderna or Pfizer bivalent vaccines as booster doses for individuals 18 years and older.

Available surveillance data from Canada and international jurisdictions indicate that the risk of myocarditis and/or pericarditis following a first booster dose of an original COVID-19 vaccine appears to be lower than the risk following the second dose of the primary series.

**14. How long should I wait after getting COVID-19 to get the bivalent booster?**

Evidence shows that vaccination combined with infection provides stronger and longer-lasting protection from COVID-19 than infection alone. With the spread of new and transmissible variants, it is important that everyone gets vaccinated to protect themselves and those around them from serious illness, hospitalization and death.

If you have had COVID-19, you should wait a minimum of three months (84 days) after symptom onset or positive test (if you had no symptoms) to receive your booster dose; however, a six-month (168 day) interval may provide better immune response.

If you have questions about COVID-19 vaccines, please contact your primary care provider, or the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY for people who are deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired: 1-866-797-0007), which is open seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and capable of providing assistance in more than 300 languages.

**15. How long should I wait in between receiving my bivalent booster and flu shot?**

Individuals aged five and over may receive a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as, or at any time before or after non-COVID-19 vaccines, including the influenza vaccine.

**16. If I don't want the bivalent booster, can I request the original vaccine?**

All COVID-19 vaccine booster dose appointments for Ontarians aged 12 years and older will be for the bivalent vaccine, which is the recommended booster. The bivalent vaccine better protects against the most recently circulating COVID-19 variants in Ontario. However, individuals who wish to receive the original COVID-19 vaccine can request to do so at the vaccine site.

Health Canada has one of the most rigorous scientific review systems in the world and only approves a vaccine if it is safe, works and meets the highest manufacturing and quality standards. After a thorough and independent scientific review of the evidence, Health Canada determined that the authorized bivalent vaccine is safe and effective at providing a strong immune response against COVID-19.

**17. Have the long-term side effects of the COVID-19 bivalent vaccine been determined?**

The bivalent vaccine has a similar safety profile to the original vaccine, with the same mild adverse reactions that resolved quickly.

The benefits of getting vaccinated and being protected against COVID-19 far outweigh the risks of any side effects from the vaccine. A COVID-19 infection may cause longer-lasting symptoms and health problems for some people, which is why it is important that individuals stay up to date with their vaccinations.

**18. What does it mean to be up to date with my vaccinations?**

You are up to date with your COVID-19 vaccinations if you have completed your primary series of the vaccine and, if you are aged five and older, it has been less than six months since your last dose, or three months if you are at high-risk of COVID-19.

A completed primary series of a COVID-19 vaccine can include:

- two doses of Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, Novavax, Medicago, AstraZeneca, including COVISHIELD, in any combination, or one dose of Johnson & Johnson;
- three doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for infants and children aged six months to under five years; or
- a full or partial primary series of a non-Health Canada authorized vaccine plus any additional recommended doses of a Health Canada authorized COVID-19 vaccine to complete the primary series

Individuals should receive all recommended doses for their age, including booster doses if they are eligible, to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations.

**19. Why has Ontario updated its recommendations on when to receive a COVID-19 booster dose? What is the new recommendation?**

The province's updated booster guidance now recommends that all Ontarians aged five and older stay up to date with their vaccinations and receive a booster dose at an interval of six months since their last dose, or three months if they are at high-risk of COVID-19, and, if eligible, to receive the bivalent COVID-19 vaccine as a booster dose. These recommendations are based on evidence showing that vaccine protection decreases over time.

Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations will provide Ontarians with an extra layer of protection to manage COVID-19 and the respiratory illness season this fall as the weather cools and people spend more time indoors.

**COVID-19 Vaccine  
Bivalent Booster For 12+  
October 13, 2022**

**20. Why did the province recently change the recommended booster interval from five months to six months for individuals aged 18 and over?**

The province is making the eligibility requirements for booster doses easier for the public and vaccinators to understand when individuals are eligible for their next doses. This interval has been recommended by NACI, as evidence has shown that protection from vaccination remains after six months but decreases over time.

**21. It is being reported that the U.S. will soon be recommending COVID-19 booster shots annually? Will Canada do the same?**

The province monitors new data, including data and experiences from other jurisdictions, on an ongoing basis and continually reassesses decisions as new information emerges.