

COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Compiled by: Niraj Maulkhan, PharmD, RPh - TC FHT's Clinical Pharmacist

Reviewed By: Exec. Dir./Lead Physicians

On a regular basis, this FAQ document about the COVID-19 vaccine and its availability will be updated. Questions have been chosen using multiple sources (e.g., Gov't of Canada, Toronto Public Health, Ontario College of Pharmacists, Ontario College of Family Physicians, St. Michael's Family Health Team, etc.) and also from patient questions. Content will be added and updated so please [check back regularly](#).

Reviewed: May 31st, 2021

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1. Who can receive the COVID-19 vaccine and how can I book my first dose?

All Ontarians who have turned 12 years of age or older are eligible to book a **first dose** of the COVID-19 vaccine. Youth 12 to 17 years of age are currently only authorized by Health Canada to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Mobile and pop-up clinics have varying criteria for eligibility based on type of vaccine, age and postal code.

For a complete list of those currently eligible to receive the vaccine in the City of Toronto visit: <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-how-to-get-vaccinated/>

Residents who are eligible can book an appointment at immunization clinics in Toronto using the [Province's vaccination registration system](#) or by calling the Provincial booking system at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY 1-866-797-0007).

Health Canada's Statement:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2021/05/health-canada-authorizes-use-of-the-pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine-in-children-12-to-15-years-of-age.html>

2. When can I book my second dose appointment and how can I schedule it?

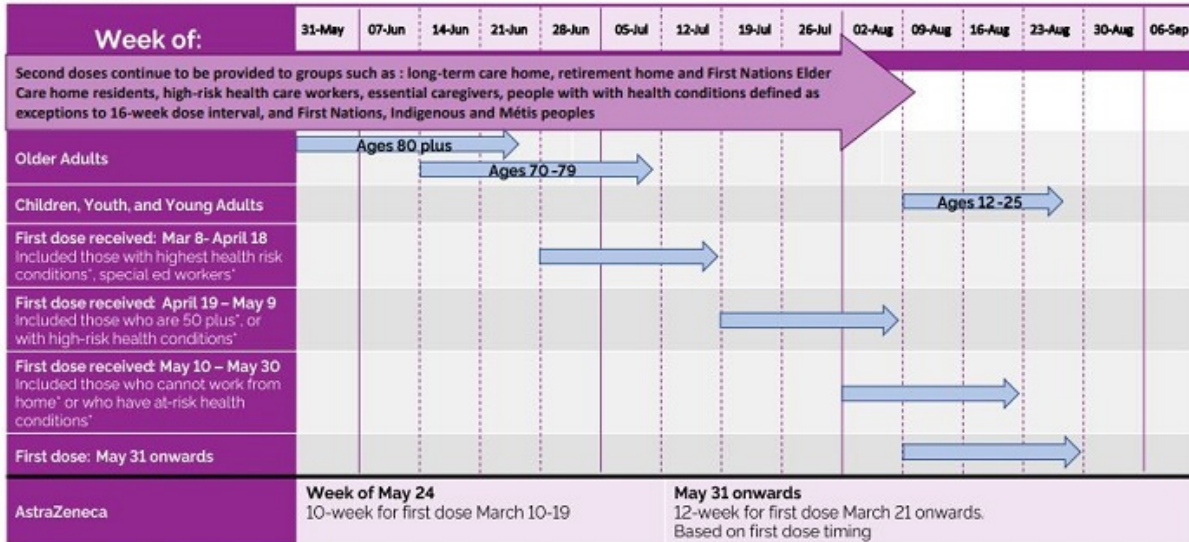
As two-thirds of the adult population in Ontario receiving their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and the vaccine supply increasing, the province has decided to accelerate the timing of the second dose for Ontarians.

The following is an anticipated schedule for eligibility to book a second dose appointment based on confirmed supply.

- **Starting May 31:** individuals aged 80+
- **Starting June 14:** individuals aged 70+
- **Starting June 28:** individuals who received their first dose between March 8 and April 18, on a "first-in, first-out" basis. For example, this included individuals with the highest-risk health conditions and special education workers.
- **Starting July 19:** individuals who received their first dose between April 19 and May 9, on a "first-in, first-out" basis. For example, this included individuals aged 50 and over, as well as individuals with high-risk health conditions.
- **Starting August 2:** individuals who received their first dose between May 10 and May 30, on a "first-in, first-out" basis. For example, this included individuals who cannot work from home and individuals who have at-risk health conditions.
- **Starting August 9:** individuals aged 12 to 25
- **Starting August 9:** individuals who received their first dose from May 31 onwards on a "first-in, first out" basis, respecting the recommended intervals

Overview of Second Dose Booking Eligibility

(Plan is based on confirmed vaccine supply and does not include June Moderna shipments; with additional vaccine supply timelines may be advanced to allow more accelerated second doses)



*Possible example only, an individual will only be able to accelerate their second dose if the first dose was received in the specified timeframe.
 Note: Dates provided are for when the group is eligible to book a second dose. The new dose interval could be as short as 28 days, where local appointments and supply are available. Timing of second dose appointments may vary based on local considerations, vaccine supply and the date of an individual's first dose appointment. Throughout the second dose rollout, the Ministry will continue to take into consideration historical as well as current COVID hotspot regions across Ontario.



Individuals who received their first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine from March 21 onwards will be eligible to receive a second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine from May 31 onwards at a 12-week interval, with appointment dates based on the timing of their first dose.

Several different vaccination clinic options are available across Ontario's public health regions, including mass immunization clinics, pop-up / mobile clinics, hospital clinics and pharmacy clinics. Not all clinic types are available in every region and depend on local planning done by each public health unit.

Second dose appointments can be rebooked through the [province's vaccination registration system](#), and through pharmacies. For those in public health units who use their own booking system, or who received their doses from their primary care provider or through a pop-up clinic, more information will follow on how and when second dose booking and rebooking will be available. Some Toronto area hospitals have announced that they will be rebooking patients who had their first doses with them.

For booking through the provincial vaccination registration system: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/book-vaccine/>

For booking through pharmacies, please note each pharmacy may carry a different vaccine (Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca), please use the filters provided in the following link to determine which vaccine the pharmacies near you are carrying: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/vaccine-locations>

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As always, please refer to <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-how-to-get-vaccinated/> for the most up-to-date information on vaccine eligibility.

For more information on accelerated doses:

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1000220/anticipated-schedule-for-second-doses-of-covid-19-vaccines>

3. Will Taddle Creek Family Health Team (TCFHT) be providing the COVID-19 vaccine?

At this time TC FHT is NOT providing the COVID-19 vaccine, however we are participating in the city of Toronto's mass vaccination clinics and pop-up clinics in the community. With vaccine supply increasing, more vaccines are available in a wide variety of ways including some family practices across Ontario. If at any point TC FHT is to provide COVID-19 vaccine we will let you know.

4. Which vaccine should I receive?

Please take the first vaccine offered to you. They are all very effective at preventing severe disease, hospitalization and death from to COVID-19.

Note: The AstraZeneca vaccine is only available as a second dose for individuals that received it for their first dose. The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are currently being offered in Canada for both first and second doses.

For more information on vaccine effectiveness and what that means in real world terms, this 7-minute video provides an excellent summary: <https://youtu.be/K3odScka55A>

5. Why did the government decide to pause the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine for first doses?

We now know that the AstraZeneca vaccine is associated with a syndrome involving unusual blood clots and reduced platelets. This syndrome is most commonly called VITT (Vaccine-Induced Thrombotic Thrombocytopenia). It happens between 4 and 28 days after the vaccine and occurs in around 1 in every 50,000 individuals receiving their first dose. You can [read more about VITT here.](#)

The government made the decision to pause the use of AstraZeneca because of the small risk of VITT and because we will have enough other vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) to vaccinate everyone in Ontario even without the AstraZeneca vaccine.

6. I got the AstraZeneca vaccine. Did I make the wrong decision? Was I misled?

You made the right decision at the time! We are in a pandemic and what we know is constantly changing based on new studies and reports that come out. VITT is a rare event so it wasn't picked up in the early trials that included ~20,000 people. But now millions of people around the

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world have had the AstraZeneca vaccine. Reporting systems around the world worked and picked up on this rare side effect.

At first, we thought it was happening in only 1 in a million doses. But on Friday May 7th, the Ontario Science Table issued a new report that clarified that VITT likely occurs in 1 in 50,000 individuals receiving their first dose of AstraZeneca which is a lot more common than we thought, **but still rare when you look at absolute numbers.**

As healthcare professionals, we encouraged people to get the AstraZeneca vaccine last month because we thought the benefits of preventing COVID-19 outweighed the risks of a serious reaction. However, now we know that the risks are higher than we thought, **and we're waiting for more guidance from NACI and provincial health authorities before we resume the administration of AstraZeneca vaccines for first doses.**

7. Does VITT occur with other vaccines?

VITT seems to occur with both the AstraZeneca and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine which are both types of viral vector vaccines. It does not happen with the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines which are mRNA vaccines.

8. Am I at risk of VITT?

If you received the AstraZeneca vaccine more than 28 days ago, then you have nothing to be concerned about. If you received a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, you also have nothing to worry about. If you received the AstraZeneca vaccine within the last 28 days, there is a very small chance you could get VITT so please monitor for the symptoms listed below.

9. What are the symptoms of VITT? What should I do if I'm worried?

Here are the symptoms of VITT you should monitor for: severe headache that does not go away, seizure, difficulty moving part of your body, new blurry vision or double vision that does not go away, difficulty speaking, shortness of breath, severe chest, back, or abdominal pain, unusual bleeding or bruising, new reddish or purplish spots, or blood blisters, new, severe swelling, pain, or colour change of an arm or a leg.

If these symptoms are severe, please call 911 and go to the nearest emergency department. If your symptoms are not severe, you can discuss them (virtually or in-person) with your doctor, nurse practitioner or nurse.

Please note that after a vaccination, it is normal to feel tired, achy, feverish, have soreness at injection site, or a mild headache within the first 3 days. Those are not signs of VITT.

10. Is VITT treatable?

Yes, VITT can be treated in the hospital if the symptoms listed above are detected early. Health care providers are getting better at knowing what VITT is and how to treat and diagnose it.

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Effective treatments are available, including blood thinners and products containing antibodies used to strengthen the immune system.

11. I received AstraZeneca for my first dose, what will happen with my second dose?

On May 11, 2021, the province paused the rollout and administration of first doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine. The decision was made out of an abundance of caution due to an observed increase in an adverse reaction, known as vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT), linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine. Ontario is working closely with health experts to continuously review the data for the use of AstraZeneca for first doses. The decision to pause was also based on the increased and more reliable supply of the Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines and the downward trend in cases.

Nearly one million Ontarians aged 40 and over received the AstraZeneca vaccine as their first dose between March 10, 2021 and May 11, 2021. Data from the UK strongly suggests a much-reduced risk of VITT in second doses of AstraZeneca – one in 600,000. Based on this evidence, the province is committed to ensuring Ontarians who received the AstraZeneca vaccine for their first dose, and who do not receive their second dose at the 10-week interval during the week of May 24, will have the ability to receive a second dose of AstraZeneca within the recommended interval of 12 weeks. The province is working with primary care providers and pharmacies to ensure second dose appointments are scheduled in advance of the 12-week interval, and will provide further information on how individuals who received their first dose of AstraZeneca can book a second dose appointment in the near future.

The province is also looking closely at available data and evidence from a clinical trial in the UK evaluating the administration of two doses of different vaccines and has requested direction from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). At this time, NACI does not recommend that vaccines of different types (e.g., mRNA vaccine and viral vector vaccine) be used in the two-dose series, as data on the immune response following mixed vaccine schedules are not yet available. Further information from clinical trials and NACI's recommendation are anticipated to be available in June 2021.

The province will provide further guidance with respect to administering doses of two different vaccines in the near future and in advance of the 12-week interval when most people are needing to receive their second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine. When the time comes to receive a second dose, everyone who received a first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine will receive either an AstraZeneca or mRNA vaccine for their second dose.

Reference: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1000174/ontario-proceeding-with-second-dose-administration-of-astrazeneca>

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12. I received the AstraZeneca shot and feeling really stressed and anxious. What can I do?

Remember that you made a good choice to protect yourself from COVID-19 and you are probably already getting some of that benefit! The risk of VITT is very, very small. Keep in mind that the UK has given the vaccine to millions of its residents and it is doing very well right now in terms of COVID-19.

If you're struggling with anxiety, check out this website from the Government of Canada that provides resources and also virtual counselling <https://wellnesstogether.ca>

Many thanks to St. Michael's Hospital Academic Family Health Team for providing the AstraZeneca vaccine FAQ for questions 5-11.

13. I have allergies, so is it safe for me to get the vaccine?

Over 14 million COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Canada as of May 3rd, 2021. Serious adverse events and anaphylaxis are very rare with the COVID-19 vaccines, occurring in only 0.009% of doses given. Unless you have a history of allergic reaction to components of the vaccine, or to the first dose of the vaccine, Health Canada recommends vaccination.

When you receive a vaccination, it is always advised to wait at least 15 minutes after receiving a vaccine, since an allergic reaction or anaphylaxis is possible. For those with a history of allergies, even to food, pets or other non-medical causes, waiting 30 minutes after receiving a vaccine is recommended.

By clicking the vaccine name below you can review the vaccine ingredients in non-medical terms and [learn more about polyethylene glycol](#).

[Pfizer-BioNTech](#)

[Moderna](#)

[AstraZeneca](#)

[Johnson & Johnson](#)

Reference:

Centre for Effective Practice: <https://tools.cep.health/tool/covid-19-vaccines/#allergicreaction>

14. Can I receive other vaccines at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine?

A waiting period before and after receiving another type of vaccine is recommended so that any side effects from one vaccine are not confused with side effects of another. The recommendation is to wait at least 14 days after receiving another vaccine before receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, and at least 28 days after receiving each COVID-19 vaccine dose before receiving another vaccine based on recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI).

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15. Can I take medication for pain after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine injection?

Side effects such as shoulder pain or fever are generally mild and should only last a few days. Applying a cool damp cloth where the vaccine was given may help with soreness.

If needed, you may use over-the-counter medicine such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, acetylsalicylic acid (ASA), or antihistamines for any pain and discomfort you may experience after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, and you have no other medical reasons that prevent you from taking these medications. It is not recommended to take these medications before vaccination for the purpose of trying to prevent side effects.

16. How long after having had COVID-19 can one get the vaccine?

While there is not a mandatory waiting period between having COVID-19 disease and being immunized, it is recommended that people wait until they are feeling better, with no symptoms of a new illness (such as recent fever or cough).

Additionally, symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals who have been advised to self-isolate due to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection or due to close contact with a COVID-19 case should not attend a vaccine clinic and should wait to get their vaccine until their isolation period is over.

Reference:

https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/COVID-19_vaccine_info_sheet.pdf

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines.html>

17. Should a patient who had COVID-19 previously still receive the full course of the two-dose vaccine (versus a single dose only)?

For now, those who have previously had COVID should get a full course of the vaccine. It is still uncertain how long protection or immunity against the COVID-19 virus will last in these individuals.

18. Does the vaccine stop transmission of the virus? Can vaccinated people gather together with others who are vaccinated?

Although the vaccine will protect you, at this time it hasn't been proven that getting vaccinated will stop you from carrying the virus and possibly infecting others. Given the current evidence, after vaccination everyone should continue to follow all public health measures, including physical distancing, wearing a mask and hand hygiene. Socializing with people from other households is still discouraged for now. Please note that you are partially protected 14 days after the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and you are considered fully vaccinated 14 days after your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

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19. How long does the protection conferred by the vaccine(s) last?

Because the vaccines are relatively new, we don't know for sure how long the vaccines are protective and whether/when a booster may be needed. Information is being collected now in real time and research is ongoing to determine how long immunogenicity lasts.

20. What is the latest on vaccines for pregnant women?

Pregnant women were not part of the clinical trials for the vaccines. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada has stated the vaccine should be offered to pregnant women: "the documented risk of not getting the COVID-19 vaccine outweighs the theorized and undescribed risk of being vaccinated during pregnancy or while breastfeeding".

Pregnant individuals are now eligible to book their vaccines in Ontario at city immunization clinics and hospital immunization clinics. This comes as a response to the increase risk for severe illness for pregnant women infected with COVID-19.

Pregnant individuals who have their second dose scheduled on or after your expected date of delivery. You may move your appointment up to 1 month prior to your expected date of delivery. You may book the appointment at <https://forms.uhn.ca/PublicForms/Form/VcACR>
Please note you will be asked to provide a note from your primary care provider to be presented at your second dose appointment.

21. When will the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 Vaccine be available and what are the risks associated it?

The Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine has been approved in Canada since March 5, 2021. Canada received 300,000 doses on April 26, however on April 30 Health Canada announced it was holding back the rollout of the vaccine due to quality concerns. These J&J doses will only be released for distribution once Health Canada ensures they have met its "high standards for quality, safety and efficacy".

We know the J&J vaccine's side effects are similar to other vaccines and are mild to moderate. Common side effects include pain at the site of injection, body chills, feeling tired and feeling feverish.

There have been reports of extremely rare blood clots reported within 13 days after receiving the Johnson and Johnson Covid-19 vaccine. In the U.S. there have been six very rare blood clot cases among nearly 7 million doses administered. Health Canada has ensured that the benefits continue to outweigh the risks at this time.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/janssen.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/JJUpdate.html>

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In summary, the vaccines are safe and effective. We will continue to monitor the vaccine rollout and provide you with the most relevant science-based information as soon as we have it available to us.

Please remember, our healthcare professionals and offices remain accessible to you by phone or in person visits (if deemed necessary). Thank you all for what you have done to keep yourselves, your loved ones, and your communities safe.