

Why do I need a third dose?

- Emerging evidence suggests vaccine effectiveness against asymptomatic infection and mild COVID-19 disease may decrease over time^{1,2,3}. Due to the highly contagious Omicron variant, a third dose is recommended to help restore and maintain protection against infection^{1,2,3}.
- Two doses of COVID-19 vaccines may be less effective against the Omicron variant, compared to the Delta strain and previous variants⁴. A third dose offers additional protection against the Omicron variant⁵.
- Although Omicron appears to cause less severe disease, third doses are recommended to protect our healthcare system and limit the number of hospitalizations, due to Omicron's high transmissibility⁴.

Is it safe?

- Research suggests that a third dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine produces a very good immune response that is higher than the immune response after two doses, has a favourable safety profile, and provides good short-term protection against infection².
- Side effects of a third dose can include pain, redness or swelling at the site of injection, as well as tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, and mild fever⁶.

Which vaccines will be offered for the third dose?

- Only Moderna or Pfizer vaccines will be used for third doses (regardless of which COVID-19 vaccine was received for the first and second doses)². It is advised that individuals younger



than 30 years of age receive a Pfizer vaccine for their third dose. This is due to the higher rate of myocarditis/pericarditis seen in individuals between the ages of 12 and 29 following vaccination with Moderna compared to Pfizer⁷.

Who should receive a third dose?

1. Adults 18 years of age and older²
2. Residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes and other congregate settings for older adults²
3. Moderately and severely immunocompromised individuals²
4. Health care workers and designated essential caregivers in congregate settings (including long-term care home and retirement home staff and designated caregivers)²
5. Individuals who received a complete series of viral vector vaccines (two doses of the AstraZeneca or Janssen COVID-19 vaccine)²
6. First Nation, Inuit and Métis adults and their non-Indigenous household members²

- It is recommended that moderately and severely immunocompromised individuals receive their third dose 28 to 56 days after their second dose, but the timing should be decided with their treating provider^{2,9}. All other listed groups should receive their third dose at least three months after their second dose^{2,5}. Individuals 18 years of age and older are also eligible for a third dose three months after receiving their second dose⁸. In the coming months, Ontario will be expanding eligibility for third doses to all Ontarians aged 12 and over⁹.

Why are certain populations strongly encouraged to receive a third dose?

- Older adult populations living in high-risk settings (i.e., congregate living with other vulnerable, high-risk adults) are at an increased risk of infection and severe illness due to a reduced immune response and a more rapidly decreasing antibody response¹.
- Moderately and severely immunocompromised individuals are at increased risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection due to their sub-optimal immune response to the two-dose COVID-19 vaccination series^{1,2}.
- Older adults are more likely to experience severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 infection, due to their age and underlying medical conditions².
- Health care workers are at an increased risk of COVID-19 infection due to their ongoing interactions and potential exposure to patients who are or may be infected with COVID-19². Health care workers may also pose an increased risk of transmission to vulnerable populations they work with, if they become infected with COVID-19¹.
- Vaccine effectiveness against COVID-19 has consistently been somewhat lower with viral vector vaccines compared to mRNA vaccines³.
- First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 in Canada and have experienced higher rates

of COVID-19 infection due to various health inequities^{1,2}.

Third doses are being recommended to these populations based on evidence of gradual waning immunity three months after receiving a second dose and a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19².

Who should receive a fourth dose?

- A fourth dose of a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine is recommended for residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes, and older adults living in other congregate settings who received their third dose at least three months ago due to waning immunity against the COVID-19 virus⁸.
- Moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals are also recommended to receive a fourth dose at least three months after their third dose⁸.

How can I book my third dose appointment?

- Through the [COVID-19 vaccination portal](#)
- Call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900
- Public health units that use their own booking systems
- Indigenous-led vaccination clinics
- [Select pharmacies](#)
- Primary care settings



References

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