

# Ministry of Health Provides Five COVID-19 Related Updates

## Update to York Region health care providers as of September 21, 2021

On September 12 and 14, 2021, Ontario's Ministry of Health provided five important updates for all health care providers regarding COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccination. Please see below for a summary of updates and links to the provincial guidance documents:

1. **Update on use of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in Ontario**
2. [Updated guidance on fully immunized status in Ontario](#)
3. [Guidance for individuals vaccinated outside of Ontario/Canada](#)
4. [Updated COVID-19 vaccine third dose recommendations](#)
5. [Medical exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination](#)

### 1. Update on use of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in Ontario

Individuals 18 years of age or older are only able to receive AstraZeneca only in the following circumstances:

1. An allergist/immunologist's assessment of an allergic reaction to a previous dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine or any components of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine indicate they require access to the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine
2. A specialist's assessment of an Adverse Effect Following Immunization (AEFI) following a first dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine determines the individual requires access to the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine for their second dose

Due to limited supply in the province, AstraZeneca vaccine will be reserved strictly for only those who meet conditions 1 or 2. Those who have received their first dose of AstraZeneca vaccine that do not meet conditions 1 or 2 should complete their series with an mRNA vaccine.

AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine must not be administered to anyone younger than 18 years of age.

The Province of Ontario currently has supplies of AstraZeneca vaccine that expires on October 31, 2021. This expiry will not be extended.

**If you have any patients that require or will require AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, please contact York Region Public Health as soon as possible via our health care professionals' line at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 77280 (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday).**

Supplies of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine are limited in our vaccine inventory. Please allow a few days to fulfill your vaccine request for AstraZeneca vaccine.

## 2. Updated guidance on fully immunized status in Ontario

As noted in the Ministry's [guidance document on fully vaccinated status in Ontario](#), an individual is considered fully vaccinated if they have received:

- The full series of a COVID-19 vaccine authorized by Health Canada (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine), or any combination of such vaccines, or
- One or two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada but approved by the World Health Organization (WHO), followed by one dose of a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine authorized by Health Canada, or
- Three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada but approved by WHO

and

- They received their final dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at least 14 days ago

## 3. Guidance for individuals vaccinated outside of Ontario/Canada

The Ministry's [guidance document for individuals vaccinated outside of Ontario/Canada](#) has been updated to include scenarios for those vaccinated with vaccines not issued by Health Canada.

**Individuals in York Region can register their vaccine doses received outside of Ontario by visiting [york.ca/COVID19Vaccine](https://york.ca/COVID19Vaccine) and accessing the [COVID-19 Immunized Outside of Ontario Form](#).**

Example scenarios include:

### Scenario 1: COVID-19 vaccines authorized by Health Canada administered outside of Ontario/Canada

This scenario applies to all vaccine products authorized by Health Canada, even if they are authorized under a different trade name in a different country.

Individuals who have proof of immunization and have received all recommended doses of a Health Canada authorized COVID-19 vaccine or a combination of Health Canada authorized vaccines with at least the minimum recommended interval between doses outside of Ontario or Canada are considered to have a complete vaccine series and no additional doses are needed.

Individuals who received the first dose of a Health Canada-authorized two-dose series outside of Ontario or Canada do not need to restart the vaccine series but should receive the second dose as close to the interval recommended by Ontario as possible.

### Scenario 2: COVID-19 vaccines not authorized by Health Canada

Individuals who have proof of immunization and have received a complete one or two-dose series of a COVID-19 vaccine that is not authorized for use by Health Canada but approved by the WHO will be offered one additional dose of an mRNA vaccine.

The minimum interval between the preceding dose and the additional dose should be 28 days.

If the individual has already received three doses of a vaccine not authorized by Health Canada but approved by the WHO at the appropriate interval, no additional doses should be offered at this time.

Individuals who have proof of immunization and have received an incomplete series of a vaccine not authorized by Health Canada but approved by the WHO, should receive one additional dose of an mRNA vaccine at a minimum interval of 28 days after the previous dose.

### Scenario 3: Unknown COVID-19 Vaccine Product

If the individual has received a previous dose(s) of a COVID-19 vaccine, but has no proof of immunization, consider whether further investigation can be done to obtain proof of immunization. If the COVID-19 vaccine product used for a previous dose(s) remains unknown, or if written proof of immunization is provided for a vaccine whose generic or trade name is not recognized, a new vaccine series should be started with a Health Canada authorized COVID-19 vaccine.

Per NACI recommendations, if the previous date of immunization was known, it would be prudent to wait for a period of at least 28 days after the administration of any other COVID-19 vaccine dose(s) before initiating a new Health Canada authorized COVID-19 vaccine series

## 4. Updated COVID-19 vaccine third dose recommendations

Ontario's Ministry of Health has issued [COVID-19 Vaccine Third Dose Recommendations](#), outlining who is eligible to receive a third dose. **The following groups should receive a third dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine:**

- **Moderately to severely immunocompromised**, defined as:
  - 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 two years of transplantation or taking immunosuppression therapy)
  - Individuals with moderate to severe primary immunodeficiency (e.g., DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
  - Individuals with stage three or advanced untreated HIV infection and those with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
  - Individuals receiving active treatment with the following categories of immunosuppressive therapies: anti-B cell therapies<sup>2</sup> (monoclonal antibodies targeting CD19, CD20 and CD22), high-dose systemic corticosteroids (refer to the CIG for suggested definition of high dose steroids), alkylating agents, antimetabolites, or tumor-necrosis factor (TNF) inhibitors and other biologic agents that are significantly immunosuppressive
- **Residents of Long-Term Care Homes (LTCH), High-Risk Retirement Homes (RH) and Elder Care Lodges**

The Ontario-recommended interval between the last dose of the initial primary series and the third dose is at least two months (8 weeks) with a minimum interval of 28 days.

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 their underlying condition.

To protect those who are immunocompromised, it also is strongly recommended that all people that come into close contact (e.g., healthcare workers and other support staff, family, friends, caregivers) with these individuals complete a full two dose vaccine series.

The recommended interval for residents of LTCH, High-Risk RH and Elder Care Lodges is at least five months (20 weeks) after the second dose.

To protect the vulnerable elderly in high-risk congregate care settings, as with those who are immunocompromised, it is strongly recommended that all people that come into close contact (e.g., healthcare workers and other support staff, family, friends, caregivers) with them complete a full two dose vaccine series.

### How to receive a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine

York Region residents who meet the criteria listed above to receive a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine should speak to their specialist or hospital program to ask for a [completed form](#) or letter to receive a third dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna). The third dose of vaccine will be given at least two months after the second dose and will match the vaccine brand received for your second dose if available.

Eligible residents may receive the vaccine through their health care provider or at a vaccination clinic. To receive a third dose at a York Region vaccination clinic, eligible residents must present a [completed form](#) or letter indicating their eligibility from their specialist or hospital program. Individuals not within the groups listed above are not eligible for a third dose at this time.

## 5. Medical exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination

Ontario's Ministry of Health issued [guidance for medical exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination](#), which may be particularly useful in the context of [Ontario's vaccine certification program](#) that takes effect on September 22, 2021. True medical exemptions are expected to be infrequent and should be supported by expert consultation. The list includes the following:

Pre-existing Condition(s)	
Severe allergic reaction or anaphylaxis to a component of a COVID-19 vaccine	<p>Qualifies for medical exemption only if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allergy was documented and evaluated by an allergist/immunologist; AND</li> <li>Discussion with allergist/immunologist has occurred on potential options for immunization with the same or alternative COVID-19 vaccine; AND</li> <li>Allergist/immunologist has determined that the individual is unable to receive any COVID-19 vaccine.</li> </ul>
Myocarditis prior to initiating an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine series (individuals aged 12-17 years old)	<p>Individuals aged 12-17 years old with history of myocarditis unrelated to mRNA COVID-19 vaccination should consult their clinical team for individual considerations and recommendations.</p> <p>Qualifies for medical exemption if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussion with relevant specialist on potential options for immunization with an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine or alternative; AND</li> <li>o Relevant specialist has determined that the individual is unable to receive any COVID-19 vaccine.</li> </ul>
Actively receiving monoclonal antibody therapy OR convalescent plasma therapy for the treatment or prevention of COVID-19	Qualifies for time-limited medical exemption while they are actively receiving therapy

<b>Adverse Events Following COVID-19 Immunization</b>	
Severe allergic reaction or anaphylaxis following a COVID-19 vaccine	<p>Qualifies for medical exemption if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allergy was documented and evaluated by an allergist/immunologist; AND</li> <li>• Discussion with allergist/immunologist has occurred on potential options for (re)immunization with the same or alternative COVID-19 vaccine; AND</li> <li>• Allergist/immunologist has determined that the individual is unable to receive any COVID-19 vaccine.</li> </ul>
Thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS)/VITT4 following the Astra Zeneca/COVISHIELD COVID19 vaccine	<p>Series should be completed with an mRNA vaccine.</p> <p>Qualifies for medical exemption only if individual has medical exemption to completing their vaccine series with an mRNA vaccine</p>
Myocarditis or Pericarditis following a mRNA COVID-19 vaccine	<p>Qualifies for medical exemption if myocarditis/pericarditis was diagnosed after medical evaluation (e.g. ER physician, relevant specialist).</p> <p>In situations where there is uncertainty regarding myocarditis/pericarditis diagnosis, discussion should occur with relevant specialist on potential options for (re)immunization with the same or alternative COVID-19 vaccine. The individual qualifies for a medical exemption if the relevant specialist has determined that the individual is unable to receive any COVID-19 vaccine.</p>
Serious adverse event following COVID-19 immunization (e.g. results in hospitalization, persistent or significant disability/incapacity)	<p>Qualifies for medical exemption if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event has been medically evaluated; AND</li> <li>• Discussion has occurred with a relevant specialist (e.g., allergist/immunologist, SIC network, Medical Officer of Health, etc.) on the individual's risks and benefits of potential options for immunization with the same or alternative COVID-19 vaccine; AND</li> <li>• Relevant specialist has determined that the individual is unable to receive any COVID-19 vaccine</li> </ul>

## **York Region Public Health Can Help**

If you have any questions, health care providers can call our dedicated line at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 77280 (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday) and visit [york.ca/healthprofessionals](https://york.ca/healthprofessionals)

Please share [york.ca/COVID19Vaccine](https://york.ca/COVID19Vaccine) for more information on COVID-19 vaccines, including clinics where your patients can get vaccinated today.