



Do I need a COVID booster? When should I get it?



Two COVID vaccine doses give you important protection. But this protection drops over time and 2 doses do not protect as well against new variants like Omicron. Experts now recommend COVID boosters for almost everyone 12 years and older.

Getting boosters will give you the best protection from:

- ✓ Getting COVID
- ✓ Spreading COVID
- ✓ Getting so sick from COVID that you have to go to hospital

Getting boosters is common. For example, people get 4 vaccines for polio in the first year of life.

How many vaccine doses do I need?

Knowing how many doses of a COVID vaccine to get can be confusing. The number of doses you need depends on your age, whether you have a weakened immune system** and whether you live in a setting where you are at higher risk of getting COVID.

In general, experts recommend:

- » All children 5+ should get at least 2 doses;
- » Teens at higher risk of getting COVID or of getting seriously ill from COVID should get at least 3 doses;
- » All adults 18+ should get at least 3 doses;
- » Adults 80+ and seniors living in congregate settings should get at least 4 doses;
- » People who have a weakened immune system should get an extra dose.

Experts have also said that:

- » 3 doses can be considered for all teens;
- » 4 doses can be considered for First Nations, Inuit and Métis adults;
- » 4 doses can be considered for adults 70–79.

Recommendations change as we learn more. Use the charts on the next page to figure out how many doses you can get in Ontario.

COVID vaccine recommendations for people who do not have a weakened immune system**

	Initial doses		First booster	Second booster
	1st dose	2nd dose	3rd dose	4th dose
Age 5 - 11	✓	✓		
12 - 17	✓	✓	✓*	
18+ AND living in a group setting	✓	✓	✓	✓*
18+ and First Nations, Inuit or Métis	✓	✓	✓	✓*
18+ and live with someone who is First Nations, Inuit or Métis	✓	✓	✓	✓*
18 - 59	✓	✓	✓	
60 - 79	✓	✓	✓	✓*
80+	✓	✓	✓	✓

* People in these groups can get boosters in Ontario as of April 6, 2022. Recommendations may be different in other parts of Canada and around the world.

** Examples of individuals with weakened immune systems include people undergoing dialysis, being treated for cancer, organ transplant recipients, stem cell transplant recipients, those with genetic disorders that affect the immune system, those with advanced or untreated HIV, those receiving active treatment with high dose steroids, and people taking other medications that affect the immune system.

COVID vaccine recommendations for people who have a weakened immune system**

	Initial doses			First booster	Second booster
	1st dose	2nd dose	3rd dose	4th dose	5th dose
5 - 11	✓	✓	✓		
12 - 17	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18+ AND living in a group setting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*
18+ and First Nations, Inuit or Métis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*
18+ and live with someone who is First Nations, Inuit or Métis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*
60 - 79	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*
80+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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When can I get the first booster ?

If you are at least 18 years old, you can get your first booster 3 months (84 days) after your second dose (or third dose, if you have a weakened immune system).

If you are between 12 and 17 years old, you can get your first booster 6 months (168 days) after the second dose (or third dose, if you have a weakened immune system).

A longer spacing between vaccine doses generally gives stronger, longer lasting protection. However, if there is a lot of COVID in your community, getting a COVID booster earlier may make sense. If you have risk factors for more serious illness with COVID, getting a COVID booster sooner may make sense. This includes people who live in congregate settings and people who have chronic health conditions.



When can I get the second booster?

If you are eligible, you can get a second booster as soon as 3 months (84 days) after your first booster. However, experts recommend most people wait 5 months (140 days) after the first booster. Waiting longer will give you stronger, longer lasting protection. If you live in a high-risk setting, like a long-term care home, experts in Ontario recommend getting the second booster 3 months after your first booster.

Does it matter whether I get Moderna or Pfizer?

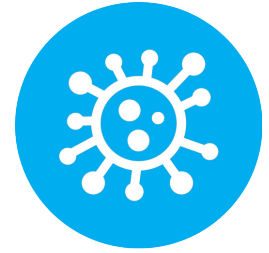
The Moderna and Pfizer COVID vaccines are both safe and approved as boosters. They are both mRNA vaccines. Their ingredients are very similar, and they work in the same way. The Moderna vaccine contains a higher dose of mRNA than Pfizer. For most people who get Moderna, the booster will be half of the original dose.

It is safe and effective to mix and match Moderna and Pfizer vaccines to get all recommended doses. For people younger than 30, the Pfizer vaccine is preferred. This is because rare side effects called myocarditis and pericarditis have happened more after the Moderna vaccine, especially in younger males.

Do I still need boosters if I already had COVID?

Yes. You should get all recommended vaccine doses, even if you had a COVID infection. Getting all recommended vaccine doses will make sure you have the strongest, longest lasting protection.

It is safe to get a booster as soon as you are feeling better and your isolation period has ended. Experts recommend waiting 3 months after you had COVID to get a booster. This will give you better protection for longer.



What if I'm pregnant?

Getting a COVID booster is especially important if you are pregnant. Getting COVID when you are pregnant can cause serious problems for you and your baby. A booster can prevent those complications and lower the risk of your newborn getting COVID.



To learn more about COVID-19 boosters, visit <https://uwaterloo.ca/pharmacy/sites/ca.pharmacy/files/uploads/files/covid-19-boosters-faq.pdf>.

For the most up-to-date information on who is eligible for COVID boosters in Ontario and how to book appointments, visit <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/getting-covid-19-vaccine#booster-doses>. You may be able to get a booster at your pharmacy, your family doctor's office or at a public health clinic.

Remember: While COVID continues to be common in Ontario, there are things you can do to protect yourself and others.

- ✓ Get all vaccine doses that are recommended for you.
- ✓ If you feel sick, stay home.
- ✓ Wear a well-fitted mask in indoor public spaces.
- ✓ Gather outdoors whenever possible.