

COVID-19: Vaccines, Treatments and Testing Summary Information for Family Physicians

Vaccines

Recommendations

Ontario recommends the most recently updated COVID-19 vaccine in fall 2024, including for those who did not receive a vaccine in the spring. Specific details about the fall vaccine are forthcoming. Further recommendations are expected to align with NACI's Guidance on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in the fall of 2024.

An **interval of six months** since previous COVID-19 vaccine or infection is recommended for optimal response; the minimum interval is three months.

Updated vaccine is strongly recommended for:

- All adults 65 years of age or older.
- Those six months of age and older who are:
 - Residents of long-term care homes and other congregate living settings.
 - Individuals with underlying medical conditions that place them at higher risk of severe COVID-19, including children with complex health needs.
 - Individuals who are pregnant.
 - Individuals in or from First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.
 - Members of racialized and other equity-deserving communities.
 - People who provide essential community services.
- Unvaccinated people aged five years of age and older who are **moderately to severely immunocompromised** are strongly recommended to receive two doses. This may start prior to fall 2024. As noted by NACI, based on clinical discretion, a third dose may be given to those who are moderately to severely immunocompromised regardless of the vaccine platform.

Anti-virals

Who To Treat

Use clinical judgement and conduct a risk-benefit analysis. In general, treat adults with positive test, mild to moderate illness AND at **high risk** for hospitalization or death. Screeners to identify patients at high risk. **Transplant recipients with symptoms or positive test must always be referred to their transplant centre.** Treatment algorithm.

Treatment Options

Paxlovid® should be first-line option if positive test and five days or less since symptoms onset, and safe for patient. Contraindications include severe liver impairment and hypersensitivity; dose should be adjusted as needed for renal impairment. Drug interaction information.

Paxlovid is no longer publicly funded outside of the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) plan. The ODB plan covers adult recipients who meet Limited Use (LU) criteria. ODB Formulary online search form. Criteria and LU codes:

- Age 65 or older (LU code: 673).
- Immunocompromised – any vaccine status, any age (LU code: 674).
- Medical condition(s) that indicate risk of severe COVID-19 (LU code: 675) See medical conditions on page 8.

Patients may pay for the drug if not covered under ODB. They may be insured under a private plan or eligible for Trillium Drug Program.

Remdesivir is indicated when a patient cannot take Paxlovid because potential drug-drug interaction cannot be safely managed, there are medical contraindications, or symptom onset is more than seven days. It must be feasible for the patient to access three days of parenteral therapy.

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- All other previously vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals (six months of age and older) who are not at increased risk for infection or severe COVID-19 may receive the most recently updated vaccine in fall 2024.

How To Get Vaccinated

Details of vaccination in the fall of 2024 are forthcoming. Advise patients who require COVID-19 vaccination – including those starting a primary series – to book an appointment with:

- Your clinic (if COVID vaccines offered).
- A nearby [participating pharmacy](#).
- The [Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre](#).
- Their [local public health unit](#).

How To Access Treatments

Paxlovid: Provide patients with a prescription to be dispensed at a community pharmacy. It can usually be sourced quickly by pharmacies who do not have the product on hand. Note that a prescription may be logged in advance at pharmacy and dispensed when/if positive test. Some pharmacists at community pharmacies can prescribe and/or dispense Paxlovid directly to patients.

Remdesivir: Remdesivir is available to patients in the community through Ontario Health atHome (Formerly known as Home and Community Care Support Services). Prescribers in hospitals or in the community can refer a patient to their local branch for a nurse to administer. [Get referral forms and procedures.](#)

How To Access Tests/Testing

- **Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs):** Details are pending about public availability of RATs in the fall.
 - While supplies last, order via the [PPE Supply Portal](#) (must be registered for the Provincial Antigen Screening Program).
 - May be available to the public from some pharmacies and through some public health units.
- **PCR testing:** For eligible patients:
 - Order using PHO requisition form.
 - PCR testing available through some pharmacies and [provincial testing locations](#).

