

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

October 22, 2024

## Vaccines

### Recommendations

Ontario is recommending vaccination with an updated COVID-19 vaccine this fall to better protect against the currently circulating variants. This recommendation is in alignment with the [National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\)](#).

Previously vaccinated individuals aged six months and older who have completed their primary series can receive a dose. The minimum time from a previous vaccine dose to this fall's vaccine dose is three months. One's history of COVID-19 infection does not affect timing of fall vaccination, and the COVID-19 vaccine can be received at the same time, or at any time before or after other vaccines, including flu.

#### Updated vaccine is 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.

#### Not previously vaccinated:

- Infants and children aged 6 months to 4 years with no previous COVID-19 vaccinations and who are not immunocompromised may use a 2-dose series of a COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccine site administrators will advise the appropriate interval between doses.

## 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 a potential drug-drug interaction cannot be safely managed, there are medical contraindications, or symptom onset is more than five days and less than seven days. It must be feasible for the patient to access three days of parenteral therapy.

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

- People aged five years and older with no previous COVID-19 vaccinations and who are not immunocompromised only require a single dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Individuals six months of age and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised with no previous vaccinations are recommended to receive an additional dose of a COVID-19 vaccine compared to what is stated above.
- 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.

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

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.
- Their local public health unit.
- The Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre.

## How To Access Tests/Testing

Testing is intended for individuals who would be eligible for treatment, i.e., at high risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection.

- **Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs):**
  - Continue to order for testing your patients via the PPE Supply Portal (must be registered for the Provincial Antigen Testing 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.

## 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.

