

October 10, 2023

## COVID-19 Vaccines for Infants, Children and Youth

It is important for everyone to stay up-to-date with their vaccinations for the best protection from getting very sick or being hospitalized, especially those with weaker immune systems. COVID-19 vaccination continues to:

- Lower the risk of becoming seriously sick from COVID-19. Healthy young people have been hospitalized from COVID-19. Vaccination protects from serious complications.
- Protect against [long COVID](#).

The National Advisory on Immunization (NACI) and Ontario Ministry of Health recommends everyone six months and older get a dose of the updated COVID-19 vaccine. This vaccine targets the XBB strain of the Omicron variant to boost protection against severe COVID-19 and may be better against currently spreading variants.

COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, including for people with a health condition, such as allergies, asthma, diabetes, or a weak immune system.

### **Vaccinated in the past:**

Get a dose of the updated COVID-19 vaccine if it has been six months since their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or known COVID-19 infection (whichever is later)

- A shorter time period between doses (three to six months) may be considered based on age and risk. Talk to your child's health care provider about the best option for them.

The updated COVID-19 vaccine may be used to complete a vaccine series or as a booster. Where possible, the same vaccine product (Pfizer or Moderna) used for starting a series should also be used to complete a series.

COVID-19 vaccines are interchangeable which means that they are very similar and either vaccine can be used. Children under five years of age getting a different vaccine product (Moderna and Pfizer) to complete their COVID-19 series are recommended to get three doses.

### **Not vaccinated in the past:**

Everyone six months of age and older is eligible to start a primary series with an updated COVID-19 mRNA vaccine. The Ontario Ministry of Health recommends the following:

- Six months to four-year-olds
  - **Two doses** of the updated Moderna vaccine at least eight weeks apart OR
  - **Three doses** of the updated Pfizer vaccine at least eight weeks apart
  - To further improve protection and effectiveness of the vaccine, NACI and the Ontario Ministry of Health recommends [eight weeks as the best interval between doses](#) in the primary series. Evidence will continue to be monitored and information will be updated as needed.
- Everyone five years of age and older get one dose of the updated COVID-19 vaccine

Anyone six months of age and older with weakened immune systems and are considered [moderately to severely immunocompromised](#), are recommended to get **ONE additional dose** in their XBB schedule. It is important to speak with your child's health care provider about the timing for them to have the best immune response from the vaccine and minimize delays in their treatment.

### How the Vaccine Works

- mRNA vaccines teach our immune system to make antibodies that protect us from COVID-19.
- The vaccines do not contain the COVID-19 virus, so your child cannot get an infection from the vaccine.
- It takes at least two weeks after each vaccine dose to have protection.

### Vaccine Ingredients and Allergies

The mRNA vaccines contain lipids (fats), salts, sugars, and buffers. They do not contain eggs, gelatin (pork), gluten, latex, preservatives, antibiotics, or aluminum. These vaccines are safe for children with food, medication, or environmental allergies. Speak with a health care provider if your child is allergic to polyethylene glycol (PEG) or tromethamine (Tris). Allergic reactions, including serious reactions (anaphylaxis), are rare. Allergic reactions can be treated and are usually temporary. Get medical help if your child has trouble breathing or develops hives or swelling in the face and throat.

### Side Effects and Risks

Side effects in children are similar to those in youth and adults. They are usually mild, and last one to three days. Side effects usually mean that the vaccine is working. Common side effects include:

- redness, swelling or pain where the vaccine was given
- headache
- feeling tired
- joint pain and/or muscle aches

- chills and/or fever
- nausea and/or vomiting

Get medical attention if your child has a high fever (over 40°C) or side effects that last more than three days after vaccination.

### **Myocarditis and Pericarditis**

Myocarditis and pericarditis (types of heart inflammation) can occur after a COVID-19 infection and can be serious. In rare cases, it can occur after getting vaccinated, but it is milder and gets better usually within a few days. Get medical attention if your child develops chest pain, shortness of breath, or a racing heart a few weeks after vaccination. Vaccination is still recommended as the benefits are greater than any risk.

### **Wait to Get Vaccinated**

Getting vaccinated is strongly recommended even if your child has had a COVID-19 infection, to benefit from hybrid immunity (combined protection from being vaccinated for COVID-19 and a past COVID-19 infection).

If your child has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19, you should wait until they are feeling better to get them vaccinated. If self-isolation is required, your child should wait until their isolation period is over. To get the best immune response, it is recommended to wait eight weeks from when their symptoms started, or they tested positive to get vaccinated for the primary series.

### **COVID-19 and other Vaccines**

Routine childhood vaccination is still important during COVID-19. Children and youth six months of age to 17 years old can safely get the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as other vaccines. Learn more about [routine immunizations for children](#).

### **Consult a Health Care Provider if your Child:**

- takes medications that weaken their immune system – you may want to time the vaccination with their medications.
- had an allergic reaction four hours after getting their first COVID-19 vaccine dose.
- has severe allergies to any of the vaccine ingredients.
- had Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome (MIS-C).

### **Informed Consent to get the Vaccine**

Parent/guardian consent is required for a child under the age of 11 to get vaccinated. Youth should talk to a parent or trusted adult about the benefits of getting the vaccine. Youth might not need their parent's consent (or permission) to get vaccinated if they are 12 years or older and able to: understand information about the vaccine, why it is recommended and what will happen if they get or don't get the vaccine.



**For more information:** Talk to your health care provider and visit [toronto.ca/COVID19](https://toronto.ca/COVID19).