

Date: April 17, 2021 - *Updated*

Memorandum To: Hospital CEOs and Public Health Unit Medical Officers of Health

From: Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery
Dr. Dirk Huyer, COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force

Subject: **Vaccination of People with Highest-Risk Health Conditions**

As you are aware, Ontario continues to expand capacity and ramp up efforts under the phased roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan. The province has now entered Phase 2 of the vaccine roll-out plan, focused on age and at-risk populations to prevent further death, hospitalization and transmission.

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance to hospitals regarding vaccination of the highest-risk health care population. These health conditions have been shown to increase the risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection.

Patient Eligibility

Individuals with the following highest-risk health conditions are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination in Ontario:

- Organ transplant recipients (including patients waitlisted for transplant);
- Hematopoietic stem cell transplant recipients;
- People with neurological diseases in which respiratory function may be compromised (e.g., motor neuron disease, myasthenia gravis, multiple sclerosis);
- Haematological malignancy diagnosed less than one year ago;
- Kidney disease eGFR < 30; and
- One essential caregiver for individuals in the groups listed above.

Patients with the specific health conditions listed above, as well as their essential caregiver, should be identified for vaccination due to an increased risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19, regardless of age.

The province is committed to vaccine administration to those with at highest-risk health conditions and is asking for your support to help identify and vaccinate these patients or direct them on where to get vaccinated. Many of you have already developed plans for these populations and we thank you. For those who have not, we are asking hospitals to:

- Work with cancer programs, renal programs and other specialists as appropriate, to identify and notify these patients that they are eligible to be vaccinated and encourage them to get vaccinated, as vaccines are safe, effective and the best way to offer protection from COVID-19.
- Transplant Programs will be connecting with patient's that have received a transplant or are waitlist at their centers with to share this information.

- Work with your PHU to determine appropriate vaccination clinics for these patients if they are unable to get vaccinated in a hospital clinic due to travel times or other factors, and how they would book into those clinics considering both first and second dose.
- Share information with patients and health care providers including primary care providers and community specialists, when practical, about how they can register for both first and second dose appointments, either at your hospital vaccine clinic or a local PHU COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic. Caregivers should be booked at the same time for an appointment in the same window of time.
 - As of April 16, 2021, at 8am, people with highest-risk health conditions can call the provincial call centre at 1-888-999-6488 to book an appointment their first and second dose appointment. They will be asked to identify and confirm themselves as having a highest risk health condition.
 - For clinics not using the provincial booking system for scheduling, please direct the patient to contact the local PHU or hospital running the clinic, to determine how patients will be booked into their appointments. A list of the PHUs not on the provincial booking system is attached.
- For those patients who can be vaccinated within their hospital program, please work with local public health unit(s) to allocate vaccine to support this model (e.g. hemodialysis patients being vaccinated in the dialysis clinic).
- For the patients that are eligible for vaccination, proof of diagnosis or eligibility from the hospital or physician is not expected. Self-attestation is all that is required whether they are being vaccinated at a hospital vaccine clinic or a community vaccine clinic.

Second Dose Interval Exceptions

There are a limited number of exceptions to the 16-week interval between the first and second vaccine dose. In these cases the interval should be maintained at the product monograph recommended interval for patients: (1) *with malignant hematologic disorders on immunocompromising therapy (chemotherapy, targeted therapies, immunotherapy)*, (2) *nonhematologic malignant solid tumors on immunocompromising therapy (chemotherapy, targeted therapies, immunotherapy)*; and, (3) transplant recipients (including solid organ transplants and hematopoietic stem cell transplants), given evidence of reduced immune response to vaccination in these individuals.¹

- This patient group will require a letter from the hospital clinic/specialist to confirm that they are eligible to get a second dose appointment at the monograph interval, identifying the reason for the exception. The letter should be presented at both the first and second appointment.

¹ Shortened dose interval is 21-28 days for Pfizer, 28 days for Moderna, and 4-12 weeks for Astrazeneca, as per the product monograph. Based on the evidence, 12 weeks has been shown to provide the best immune response for AstraZeneca. Patients should discuss the timing of their first and second vaccine dose with their health care provider in order to time the vaccine with any immunosuppressive treatments.

Vaccine	2 nd dose Interval	2 nd dose interval for exceptions
AZ	16 weeks	12 weeks
Pfizer	16 weeks	26 days
Moderna	16 weeks	26 days

- For patients who have already received a first dose, please inform them that they must contact the hospital, pharmacy, or PHU where they received their first dose to arrange their second dose at the shorter interval. They will be required to present their letter at the time of their second dose.
- Caregivers will not be eligible for the shortened second dose interval.
- When booking their appointment through the provincial call centre they will automatically be booked at the standard interval for their second dose (112 days) as the provincial booking system does not currently allow for exceptions to the standard interval in between doses.
- Patients eligible for the shortened interval, will be required to bring their letter to their dose one appointment. The clinic staff will record in COVaxON that this client (patient only, not caregiver) is eligible for a shortened interval (details of this process will be provided through COVaxON change management/training). In addition, they will mark the patient's (not caregiver) vaccine receipt with "Return in 26 Days".
- We are asking the clinics to support the return of these patients in 26 days as "**walk-ins**". We will provide a report noting the number of possible walk-ins daily to help the clinic planning and support for these "non-booked" second dose appointments.
- MOH is directing PHUs to not use AstraZeneca for patients who are eligible for a shortened second dose interval if they are using or intend to use the provincial booking system. They may still receive AstraZeneca at a pharmacy or primary care practice if they are 55 or over.
- For clinics not using the provincial booking system for scheduling, please direct the patient to contact the local PHU or hospital running the clinic, to determine how patients will be booked into their appointments. As mentioned, a list of the PHUs not on the provincial booking system is attached.
- Please note that we are developing an online rebooking option that will support the shortened interval to be used after the patient gets their first dose at the clinic. We are also investigating a second dose booking option for those who have had a first dose but had not booked their first dose through the provincial booking system. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

For further details on the provincial COVID-19 vaccine rollout plan, please visit the ministry's website.

Thank you again for your tireless efforts and unwavering commitment to Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine campaign. We look forward to continuing to accelerate COVID-19 vaccine administration and working in partnership with all health partners to ensure efficient distribution across the Province.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By

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Pandemic Response and Recovery

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cc:

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