

FALL DOSE INFORMATION

Fall COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign

Please read this carefully and ensure a health care provider answers your questions before getting the vaccine.

Why should I get vaccinated against COVID-19 this fall?

Most respiratory infections increase during fall and winter as we begin to spend more time together indoors. We are still learning about COVID-19, and while we cannot predict if there will be another wave this fall or if a new variant will appear, it is still important to receive the protection from a fall dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID-19 vaccines offer a high level of longer lasting protection against severe disease from COVID-19 and offer short-term protection against COVID-19 infection. Having had a previous COVID-19 infection also offers some short-term protection against being infected again. Protection from vaccination and/or infection can decrease over time.

The Omicron variant is usually less severe than earlier strains of the COVID-19 virus, but it can still cause hospitalization and death. The Omicron variant is also better at escaping the protection our body has built from vaccination or infection. This means that we may still become infected with Omicron even if we are vaccinated or have already had an infection. However, COVID-19 vaccines continue to provide strong, longer-lasting protection against severe disease, especially if you have had 3 or more doses.

If you have not recently had COVID-19 or a COVID-19 vaccine, then receiving a dose of vaccine in the fall will help to boost your immune system and build back some protection.

When can I get the fall dose?

If you have completed your primary series, you can receive the fall dose regardless of the number of booster doses you have already received. You just need to wait the minimum number of days since your last dose.

Most people in Nova Scotia can receive the fall dose 168 days after the last dose they received. The following groups can receive the fall dose 120 days after their last dose:

- Adults aged 70 and older
- Residents aged 12 and older living in long-term care or senior congregate living settings
- Pregnant persons
- Adults in or from First Nations communities who are 55 years of age or older
- African Nova Scotian adults aged 50 years of age or older
- Individuals aged 12 and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised

Should I still get the fall dose if I have had COVID-19?

Most people who have had COVID-19 should wait 168 days from their infection before receiving the fall dose. People who are eligible for a shortened interval of 120 days since their last vaccine should wait 120 days after their infection before receiving the fall dose.

Individuals choosing not to wait the recommended period should wait a minimum of 3 months after infection before receiving the fall dose and must still wait the minimum time since their last vaccination.

Hybrid Immunity

Hybrid immunity is the protection you get from being up to date with vaccination *and* having had COVID-19. This type of immunity is stronger than the immunity you get from vaccination or infection alone. It is therefore recommended to receive a fall dose even if you have had COVID-19, as long as the appropriate time since infection has passed.

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What should I receive for my fall dose of COVID-19 vaccine?

Public Health recommends getting a **bivalent COVID-19 vaccine** for the fall dose. Pfizer Bivalent (BA.4/5) can be used in ages 12 and older. Moderna Bivalent (BA.1) can be used in ages 18 and older. Both bivalent vaccines give protection for the original COVID-19 virus as well as the Omicron variant.

People who have not had COVID-19 in 2022 when Omicron was circulating may especially benefit from a bivalent COVID-19 vaccine because it will prime their immune system to the Omicron variant.

What are bivalent COVID-19 vaccines?

Bivalent COVID-19 vaccines target two different strains of the virus that cause COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2). The current bivalent mRNA COVID-19 vaccines use the same platform as the original mRNA vaccines, but half of the vaccine targets the original strain of SARS-CoV-2, and the other half targets the Omicron variant.

Bivalent COVID-19 vaccines increase the immune response against both the original strain of SARS-CoV-2 and the Omicron variant. It is likely that this higher level of immune response results in better real-world protection against infection and severe disease from Omicron.

Additionally, because the Omicron variant is very different from the original SARS-CoV-2 strain, vaccines that target Omicron are expected to broaden the overall immune response and may provide better protection against future variants compared to the original COVID-19 vaccines. Because both available bivalent vaccines target Omicron, this benefit is expected to occur with either vaccine.

What is known about the safety of bivalent COVID-19 vaccines?

Safety studies show that bivalent vaccines are likely to be well tolerated with similar side effects as the original mRNA vaccines.

There are no clinical trial data on the immune response or safety of available bivalent COVID-19 vaccines in pregnant persons or in persons aged 12 to 17 years of age. However, there is no reason to expect that the safety of bivalent vaccines would be different from an original mRNA vaccine. Based on the large amount of real-world evidence for the original Pfizer vaccine in those 12 to 17 years of age, the Pfizer bivalent vaccine is approved by Health Canada for use in ages 12 and older. Moderna bivalent is approved for use in ages 18 and older.

While no cases of myocarditis (swelling of the heart muscle) and/or pericarditis (swelling of the lining around the heart) were seen in the clinical trials for the bivalent COVID-19 vaccines, there is a rare risk of myocarditis and/or pericarditis following vaccination with mRNA COVID-19 vaccines. Available data suggests that the risk of myocarditis and/or pericarditis following mRNA COVID-19 vaccination is lower for doses given after the primary series is complete. Please see the [Important Information about Myocarditis and Pericarditis](#) fact sheet for more information.

Can I get my fall dose at the same time as other vaccines?

It is safe to receive the fall dose at the same time, or at any time before or after any other vaccines, including the influenza vaccine.