

Fourth vaccine doses available now for seniors, others

A fourth dose of a COVID-19 vaccine ? a second booster ? is now available in York Region for individuals 60 years of age and older five months after they received their third shot.

The new eligibility was announced by the Province of Ontario last week as wastewater signals indicate the fight against the virus is far from over.

?Since the removal of restrictions on gatherings over a month ago and the rescinding of the mask mandate three weeks ago, we have seen significant increases in COVID transmission in the community,? said Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, on Monday. ?This increase was initially gradual, but our wastewater and that of other regions of Ontario indicates a very significant increase, similar to the Omicron peak earlier this winter. We have also seen hospitalizations increase, but not as significant as those back in January. One of the things we can all do to protect ourselves ? the vulnerable and the rest of the community, including the health system ? is to continue to wear masks.?

While the mask mandates were lifted, York Region Public Health urges people to continue wearing masks in all indoor environments, particularly in crowds, areas with poor ventilation, or when in close contact with others

?COVID is not yet endemic,? said Dr. Pakes. ?We are still experiencing waves of infection as opposed to a predictable pattern. Masking and vaccinations are particularly important this coming week with several holidays that many York Region residents are celebrating, including Ramadan, which has already begun, and Passover and Easter in the coming week. I strongly encourage anyone who is eligible for a fourth dose to book your appointment right away.

?We know how important it is to our mental and social wellbeing to gather with families and loved ones. With restrictions lifted, I am certain many of you will see your families through these April holidays, but please protect yourselves and close contacts by being up to date on your vaccinations. If you're feeling unwell, please reschedule your visit or attend virtually. We owe this to each other.?

If you're still looking for your first, second or third dose, you can receive it right away at any of York Region's vaccine clinics, but if you're looking for a fourth dose/second booster, this is currently done strictly by appointment.

?Receiving a fourth dose of the COVID-19 vaccine will prevent severe outcomes should you contract the virus, including being hospitalized, getting admitted to the ICU or worse,? said Dr. Pakes. ?We know people have been asking, ?How many boosters will it take?' The answer is we still don't know, but we do know the immunity from the vaccine wanes over time, so it will depend how much COVID is circulating in the fall and whether there is a new variant.

?We know the vaccine is safe and effective. Whether this is something we will have to have every year like the influenza vaccine we don't know yet. We're focusing on the now and our goal currently is to get through to a comfortable and healthy summer and avoid serious outcomes from COVID-19, and allow the healthcare system to serve non-COVID patients as well as COVID illness.

?The fourth dose is particularly important for those over the age of 80 or over the age of 70 who are particularly vulnerable to severe outcomes. For anyone under, it is still important to get your third dose, even if you had a COVID-19 infection already as it provides longer-lasting protection against severe outcomes and helps prevent reinfection. York Region clinics are already busy administering fourth doses to those eligible. At this time, fourth doses are by appointment only, but you can still walk into any York Region clinic for your first, second or third dose. Find a clinic near you and book an appointment at [York.ca/COVID19vaccine](https://york.ca/COVID19vaccine) or call access York at 1-877-464-9675.?

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