

## Bivalent boosters available to all Ontarians 18+ this Monday

New bivalent COVID-19 boosters, with specific protections for the Omicron variant, will be available to all Ontarians 18+ this Monday, September 26.

The Province announced the rollout of the new Moderna booster last week.

Based on guidelines from Health Canada and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, the distribution of the vaccine will first be allocated to Ontario's most vulnerable populations.

The bivalent COVID-19 booster is a safe and effective way for people to better protect themselves against the most recently circulating COVID-19 variants in Ontario, said Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, in a statement. As vaccine protection decreases over time, I encourage all Ontarians aged five and over to receive the booster dose they are eligible for.

The Province defines the most vulnerable populations as those individuals aged 70+, pregnant individuals 18+, healthcare workers 18+ and residents of long-term care and retirement homes, individuals living in congregate settings that provide assisted-living and health services, as well as First Nation, Inuit and Métis individuals and their non-Indigenous household members aged 18 and over.

To prioritize distribution to these populations, new booster appointments for Ontarians aged 18 and over will be paused until September 26, said the Ministry of Health last week. However, to allow for convenient planning and preparation, individuals 18 years of age and older who do not belong to a priority population can start booking their appointments today, the availability of which is based on shipment schedules and supply from the federal government. All previously-booked booster appointments for September 12 to 25 will be honoured and, if available, the bivalent vaccine will be offered. Individuals can receive the bivalent booster at the recommended interval of at least six months from their previous dose, regardless of how many boosters they have already received.

Appointments can be booked through the COVID-19 vaccination portal or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre (PVCC) at 1-833-943-3900. Eligible individuals can also book an appointment directly through public health units that use their own booking systems, Indigenous-led vaccination clinics, participating health care providers and participating pharmacies. Pregnant individuals and health care workers booking from September 12 to 25 must call the PVCC or book booster dose appointments through participating pharmacies.

In his most recent COVID-19 update to the community, Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, said he was hopeful the new vaccines would make a difference in the seasons ahead.

We're also very hopeful of the potential of the bivalent Moderna vaccine that is specific for the Omicron variant, he said. We look forward to its approval and availability in Canada in the near future. This vaccine will most certainly help to prevent a very challenging wave in Ontario through the fall and winter.

I know many of you are thinking about waiting for this bivalent vaccine, which will be available later this year, rather than getting your fourth dose now. This approach is reasonable but it is not to take the place of the third dose.

Please make sure to get your booster or your third dose as soon as possible. I can't stress enough how important the vaccine is for protection from severe illness or worse, at the individual and the population level.

Health Minister Sylvia Jones is also looking to what the cooler months ahead might bring.

With the start of the respiratory illness season, it is especially important to make sure people stay up to date with their vaccines,

said Jones. ?COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters are the best tool to keep people healthy and out of hospitals, and to ensure Ontario's economy stays open as kids go back to school and as the weather cools and people spend more time indoors.?

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