

Taking care of your health: Information about COVID-19 for people living with HIV

Frequently asked questions about COVID-19 and HIV,
and COVID-19 vaccines (updated February 2022)

Are you HIV positive and worried about the COVID-19 vaccine? Do you have questions about your health? Are you feeling afraid to reach out for health care?

This information sheet answers many of the questions people living with HIV may have about vaccines, health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic including:

- COVID-19 vaccines, 3rd dose (boosters), 4th dose, and vaccines for youth
- Finding mental health and social supports
- Getting health care and seeing a doctor during the pandemic.

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IMPORTANT NOTE: New information and science about COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccine is coming out every week and sometimes every day. The information provided here is based on what we know as of March 4th, 2022. This information is not medical advice.



Are people living with HIV at higher risk of COVID-related illness?

We are still learning about COVID-19 and how it affects people with HIV. Based on what we know at this time, people with HIV may be more likely to become seriously ill from COVID-19.

For people living with HIV, there are three main risk factors that can increase the risk of serious illness from COVID-19:

1. a weakened immune system
2. underlying health conditions
3. older age.

To learn more, talk to your doctor about how COVID-19 might affect your individual health. You can find additional information about COVID-19 and HIV at <https://www.catie.ca/covid-19-resources#hivhcv>. You can also find information about COVID-19 at the following Ontario government website: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca>



COVID-19 vaccines: safety, doses, vaccines for children and youth, and medical exemptions

The COVID-19 vaccines available to Ontarians are safe and effective in preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death, and may also reduce spread of the virus.

There are two COVID-19 vaccines currently available in Ontario (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna). Each vaccine requires at least 2 doses. Anyone born in 2016 or earlier is eligible to get a first and second dose.

All people living with HIV should consider getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

You can get your first or second dose at mass immunization clinics, pharmacies, primary care, site-specific clinics, mobile teams, pop-up clinics, and public health units.

If you are unsure about getting a COVID-19 vaccine, talk to your doctor about the benefits and risks of the vaccine.

You can find more information about HIV and COVID-19 vaccines at <https://www.catie.ca/covid-19-resources#vaccines>. For more information on COVID-19 vaccines go to: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/getting-covid-19-vaccine#which-vaccine-you-can-get>.



Is it safe for kids and young people living with HIV to get a COVID-19 vaccine?



In Ontario, children aged 5-11 years can get the paediatric Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, and youth aged 12 to 17 can receive the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. More information about COVID-19 vaccines for children and youth is available at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-children-and-youth>.

Health Canada has determined that these vaccines:

- are safe, effective, and manufactured to the highest quality
- show a strong immune response and prepare your immune system to fight against COVID-19.

Booster Vaccine Doses

What is a booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine?

A booster dose is a dose of vaccine given as the protection from the original shots starts to go down. Booster doses help people keep a higher level of protection (immunity) from the COVID-19 virus for longer.

Third Dose (booster)




Ontario is expanding eligibility for a third booster dose to all Ontarians. <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/getting-covid-19-vaccine#which-vaccine-you-can-get>.

Booster doses are being offered to all Ontarians 12 years and older. Youth ages 12-17 must wait (at least) six months (168 days) before they can get their third (booster) dose. Adults 18 years and older must wait (at least) three months (84 days) after receiving their second dose before they can get their third (booster) dose.

Some people will need a fourth booster dose. People who are eligible for a fourth booster dose must wait three months (84 days) after their third dose, and also be a resident of a:

- long-term care home
- retirement home
- elder care lodge
- other congregate setting that provide assisted-living and health services to older adults

Vaccine and Booster Dose Schedule – General Guidance

	First Dose	Second Dose	Third Dose (Booster)	Fourth Dose (Booster)
Children (ages 5-11 years)		56 days after First Dose	Not eligible	Not eligible
Youth (ages 12-17 years)		56 days after First Dose	168 days after Second Dose	Not eligible
Adults (18 years and older)		56 days after First Dose	84 days after Second Dose	84 days after Third Dose (if eligible)

What about third and fourth (booster) doses of COVID-19 vaccine for immunocompromised people?

Some people who are immunocompromised are recommended to have a primary series of three (3) COVID-19 vaccine doses plus a fourth dose booster as follows:

- a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine eight weeks (56 days) after their second dose as part of a 3-dose series (which is a shorter time-period than for Ontarians seeking a third dose booster)
- a fourth dose (booster) after completion of the three-dose series (eligibility and timing of fourth dose depends on age)

Immunocompromised people with the following health conditions may be eligible for third and fourth (booster) doses:

- have Stage 3 or advanced untreated HIV infection or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
- are a transplant recipient
- are receiving stable, active treatment (chemotherapy, targeted therapies, immunotherapy) for a malignant hematologic disorder or solid tumor
- are in receipt of chimeric antigen receptor (CAR)-T-cell
- have moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (for example, DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
- are undergoing active treatment with certain immunosuppressive therapies (for example, anti-B cell therapies, high-dose systemic corticosteroids) that are significantly immunosuppressive or are taking specific immunosuppressant medications
- are receiving dialysis (hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis)

Vaccine and Booster Dose Schedule – Immunocompromised Individuals

	First Dose	Second Dose	Third Dose (Booster)	Fourth Dose (Booster)
Children (ages 5-11 years)	✓	56 days after First Dose	56 days after Second Dose	Not eligible
Youth (ages 12-17 years)	✓	56 days after First Dose	56 days after Second Dose	168 days after Third Dose
Adults (18 years and older)	✓	56 days after First Dose	56 days after Second Dose	84 days after Third Dose

Contact your health care provider to see if you are eligible for a three-dose primary series and fourth dose (booster).

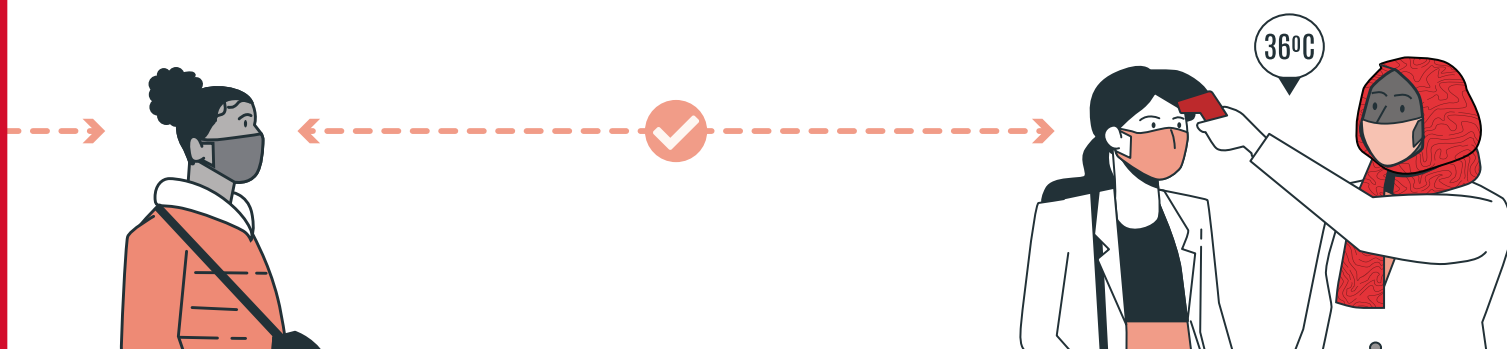
You will need to provide your prescription, prescription vial or a referral from a health care professional at the time of your three-dose primary series and fourth dose (booster) appointment.

Are there medical conditions that mean I can't get the COVID-19 vaccine?

People who have had a serious or immediate reaction to any of the ingredients in the vaccine (for example, Polyethylene glycol [PEG]) should talk to their doctor when deciding whether or not to get vaccinated.

Right now, there are only two conditions that may require a medical exemption to COVID-19 vaccination with mRNA vaccines:

1. Severe allergic reaction or anaphylaxis to a component of a COVID-19 vaccine
2. Myocarditis prior to initiating an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine or myocarditis/pericarditis after receiving an mRNA vaccine https://health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/medical_exemptions_to_vaccination.pdf.



How do I get vaccinated?

If you are eligible, you can book your first, second or third (booster) vaccine; and in some cases, fourth vaccine (booster) dose appointment through:

- the COVID-19 vaccination portal <https://covid19.ontariohealth.ca/>
- the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900
- local public health units that use their own booking systems
- Indigenous-led vaccination clinics
- select pharmacies in your area
- a primary care settings like a doctor's office.

Do I get to choose which COVID-19 vaccine I will get?

You do not get to choose your vaccine. Everyone who is vaccinated gets an mRNA vaccine, either Moderna or Pfizer.

You can get up to date information on what vaccines you may get by visiting Ontario's "Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine" website at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/getting-covid-19-vaccine#which-vaccine-you-can-get> or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900.

Do I have to talk with my doctor before I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Generally, you do not need to check with your doctor before getting the COVID-19 vaccine. However, you should talk to your doctor about vaccine options and to obtain any needed prescription or referral for the three-dose series and/or fourth-dose (booster) if you:

- have any problems with your immune system (e.g. a CD4 count below 200) or take medications that can affect your immune system
- have had severe allergic reactions to vaccinations before
- are pregnant or breastfeeding
- have an autoimmune condition (e.g. multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis).

Learn more about COVID-19 vaccine safety and when to talk to your health care provider at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccine-safety#who-should-not-get-the-vaccine>.

What if I don't have a doctor?

If you do not have a doctor or you are unable to see your regular doctor call Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000) for free, confidential advice or information. A Registered Nurse will take your call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Assistance is available in more than 300 languages.

Additional information is available at (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-medical-advice-telehealth-ontario>).

For non-emergency issues, access an Ontario Virtual Care Clinic (<https://seethedoctor.ca/en>) 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday, to connect to an on-call doctor by video or audio, or a walk-in clinic or urgent care centre near you (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/health-care-ontario>).

If you need to find a location where HIV care can be accessed, call the Sexual Health Info Line Ontario (SHILO) at 1-800-668-2437.

If you are having a medical emergency, call 911 or visit the nearest hospital emergency department.

Where can I sign up to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccines can be booked online at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/book-vaccine/> or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900.

Talk to your health care provider if you can't access the online vaccine system or if you are unsure how to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Is it safe for me to access HIV care during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes. People living with HIV may need treatment and monitoring for other health conditions during the pandemic.

Your health is important! If you feel unwell or have a question or concern about your health, contact your health care provider. It is also important to:

- keep taking your medication
- keep your medical appointments with your doctor and other health care providers
- know how to contact your health care providers in case you need advice.



Dealing with isolation and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has been going on for a long time now. Many people are feeling alone and lonely right now.

Staying connected to others is important for our well-being. But this can be hard to do for a lot of reasons and it is hard to know where to start.

You can contact one of the **AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs)** listed on the following pages to find out how you can stay connected and reduce feelings of social isolation.

In Ontario, AIDS Service Organizations have stayed open during the pandemic to provide telephone and virtual services and supports. This includes activities that can help with feelings of loneliness and isolation and create ways to connect with others in your community.

These include:

- virtual community get-togethers and group activities and hangouts
- wellness checks-ins
- telephone check-ins
- video support groups and counselling.

There are other ways to connect safely online to things like, your faith community, social, hobby and sports clubs, online communities and social networks and community health care centres.



Where can I find mental health support?

For help connecting with a public mental health and addictions program or support across Ontario, people living with HIV in Ontario can also contact ConnexOntario. It is available 24/7 and is free and confidential. Call 1-866-531-2600 (toll-free) OR visit the ConnexOntario website at <https://www.connexontario.ca>.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) provides patients, families, friends and health care professionals with general information about its mental health services, information regarding eligibility requirements, and support to self-refer for addiction services. Call 416-535- 8501, and select option 2 OR visit their website at <https://www.camh.ca/en/your-care/access-camh>.

The Government of Ontario has a range of mental health supports available to you. Some of these are free, self-directed programs. Information is available at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/find-mental-health-support>.

The Ontario College of Family Physicians also provides a list of resources on mental health and addictions at <https://www.ontariofamilyphysicians.ca/tools-resources/covid-19-resources/community-supports-special-populations/ocfp-mh-patient-resources.pdf>.

eMentalHealth.ca provides a province-wide listing of free crisis lines via telephone, online and chat features at <https://www.ementalhealth.ca/Ontario/Crisis-Lines-including-Telephone-Online-and-Chat>.

If your workplace has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), you can get a number of free telephone/virtual counselling sessions with a trained counsellor.

Make an appointment to speak to your family doctor or contact your mental health care provider if you want to talk about your mental health and wellbeing.

AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) in Ontario

Barrie

The Gilbert Centre
<http://www.gilbertcentre.ca>
info@gilbertcentre.ca • 705-722-6778

Brampton

Moyo Health & Community Services*
<https://moyohcs.ca> • info@moyohcs.ca
905-361-0523 *Formerly known as PHAN
(Peel HIV/AIDS Network)

Guelph

HIV/AIDS Resources & Community Health (ARCH)
<https://www.archguelph.ca> • 519-763-2255

Hamilton

The AIDS Network
<https://www.aidsnetwork.ca>
info@aidsnetwork.ca • 905-528-0854

Kingston

HIV/AIDS Regional Services (HARS)
<http://hars.ca> • 613-545-3698

Kitchener

AIDS Committee of Cambridge,
Kitchener, Waterloo and Area (ACCKWA)
<https://www.acckwa.com>
reception@acckwa.com • 519-570-3687

London

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection
<https://www.hivaidconnection.ca>
info@hivaidconnection.ca • 519-434-1601

North Bay

AIDS Committee of North Bay and Area
<http://aidsnorthbay.com>
aaacnba@gmail.com • 705-497-3560

Oshawa

AIDS Committee of Durham Region (ACDR)
<https://www.aidsdurham.com>
info@aidsdurham.com • 905-576-1445

Ottawa

AIDS Committee of Ottawa (ACO)
<http://aco-cso.ca> • info@aco-cso.ca
613-238-5014

Bruce House

<https://brucehouse.ca> • 613-729-0911

Peterborough

Peterborough AIDS Resource Network (PARN)
<http://parn.ca> • getinformed@parn.ca
705-749-9110

Richmond Hill

CAYR Community Connections*
<https://cayrcc.org> • info@cayrcc.org
905-884-0613
*Formerly the AIDS Committee of York Region

Sault Ste. Marie

HIV/AIDS Resource Program (Algoma GHC)
<https://www.ghc.on.ca> • 705-759-5690

St. Catharines

Positive Living Niagara (PLN)
<http://positivelivingniagara.com>
info@positivelivingniagara.com
905-984-8684

Sudbury

Réseau ACCESS Network
<http://www.reseauaccessnetwork.com>
705-688-0500

Thunder Bay

Elevate NWO
<https://elevatenwo.org> • info@elevatenwo.org
807-345-1516

Windsor

Positive Pathways Community Services
<https://www.pozitivepathways.com>
info@pozitivepathways.com • 519-973-0222

Toronto

2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations
<http://www.2spirits.com> • 416-944-9300

Action Positive (French-language service provider)
<http://www.actionpositive.ca>
416-340-8484 • info@actionpositive.ca

Africans in Partnership Against AIDS (APAA)
<http://www.apaa.ca> • info@apaa.ca
416-924-5256

AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)
<https://www.actoronto.org>
ask@actoronto.org • 416-340-8484

Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP)
<https://asaap.ca> • info@asaap.ca • 416-599-2727

Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS)
<http://acas.org> • info@acas.org • 416-963-4300

Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention
(Black CAP)
<http://www.blackcap.ca> • info@black-cap.com 416-977-9955

Casey House
<https://www.caseyhouse.com> • 416-962-7600

Fife House Foundation Inc.
<https://www.fifehouse.org> • 416-205-9888

Latinos Positivos
<http://latinospositivos.ca> • 416-506-1400
volunteer@latinospositivos.ca

Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy (OAHAS)
<https://www.oahas.org> • 416-944-9481

Prisoners with HIV/AIDS Support Action Network (PAS-AN)
<http://www.pasan.org> • 416-920-9567

The Teresa Group
<https://www.teresagroup.ca>
info@teresagroup.ca • 416-596-7703

The Toronto People With AIDS Foundation (PWA)
<https://www.pwatoronto.org>
info@pwatoronto.org • 416-506-1400

Women's Health in Women's Hands (WHIWH)
<https://www.whiwh.com> • 416-593-7655
info@whiwh.com