

**Ministry of Health**

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**Ministère de la Santé**

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August 17, 2021

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO: Health Care Providers**

**RE: COVID-19 Vaccine Update: Directive 6, Expansion of eligibility to those born in 2009, and Third Doses of COVID-19 Vaccines**

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As of August 12, 2021, Ontario has administered over 20 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine reaching over 80% of eligible Ontarians with their first dose and over 70% fully vaccinated. This is an incredible accomplishment. While we reflect on our success, we must also look forward to our readiness for the fall, a potential 4<sup>th</sup> wave and continue our work to reach all of those eligible Ontarians who have not yet been vaccinated.

As you know, we have been closely monitoring the rise of the Delta variant of concern. In Ontario, Delta is the predominant strain of SARS-CoV2 virus and we have seen significant Delta outbreaks in our communities over the summer. We know first-hand the speed that this variant virus can spread and the devastating impacts of its increased transmissibility and clinical severity. In the last weeks, we have seen a concerning rise in provincial case counts and outbreaks. We must act now to protect our most vulnerable residents.

**Directive 6**

To protect Ontario's most vulnerable and medically complex patients, Directive 6 has been issued today. This directive will ensure that public hospitals, home and community care service provider organizations, Home and Community Care Support Services (HCCSS) organizations and ambulance services each have strong vaccination policies.

Organizations will be asked to develop, implement, monitor and maintain vaccination policies to ensure employees, contractors, students and volunteers are vaccinated or tested regularly.

**Expansion of eligibility to those born in 2009**

On the advice of the Children's Vaccination Table and the Vaccine Clinical Advisory Group, we will be opening eligibility to Pfizer vaccine for all of those born in 2009. This expansion has been done to ensure consistent access across the province and after close review of the experiences from other jurisdictions who have immunized this age cohort and have not

seen safety signals associated with this practice. Expanding eligibility to students born in 2009 but who have not yet had their birthday ensures broader access to the protections afforded by vaccination, helping to keep our schools safer into the fall.

### **Administration of Third Doses**

It continues to be crucial for all eligible Ontarians to complete their COVID-19 vaccine series with two doses to receive the best level of protection against infection and severe health outcomes. However, there is now emerging evidence of the suboptimal immune response in specific immunocompromised patients that may be improved with the administration of a third dose. There is also emerging literature on the reduced immune response and the more rapid waning of antibody responses in long term care home resident populations.

Effective August 18<sup>th</sup>, I am recommending a third dose of mRNA vaccine in the following immunocompromised population groups as an extension of the primary vaccine series:

- **Transplant recipients** (including solid organ transplant and hematopoietic stem cell transplants)
- **Individuals receiving treatment with an anti-CD20 agent** (e.g. rituximab, ocrelizumab, ofatumumab), commonly used for conditions such as multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, leukemias/lymphoma etc.
- **Individuals receiving active treatment** (chemotherapy, targeted therapies, immunotherapy) **for malignant hematologic disorders** (e.g. Acute myeloid leukemia, chronic myeloid leukemia, acute lymphoblastic leukemia, chronic lymphocytic leukemia)

The third dose should be offered at least two months after the second dose for the above groups, and exact timing should be decided with the treating provider in order to optimize the immune response from the vaccine series and minimize delays in management of their underlying condition.

In addition, the following highly vulnerable populations who reside in high risk settings are also recommended to receive a third dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine to boost their immune response at least 5 months after their second dose:

- **Residents of Long-Term Care Homes, High-Risk Retirement Homes and Elder Care Lodges**

The Ministry of Health (Ministry) is closely following the ongoing research in the effectiveness and safety of a third dose for all populations. Recommendations may be issued for other immunocompromised and high-risk groups as further evidence becomes available.

The Ministry also is working collaboratively with Public Health Ontario, ICES and other partners to evaluate the impact of third doses on COVID-19 outcomes. We have a strong surveillance program in Ontario evaluating for any safety signals associated with COVID-19 vaccination. Inclusion of Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFIs) reporting in your protocols is of continued importance. More information about AEFI events and reporting is available on Public Health Ontario's [website](#).

The province continues to strongly recommend that all healthcare workers, contractors, students and volunteers that come into contact with these vulnerable populations complete a full two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series as an additional way to protect these groups. Offering a full vaccine series to everyone in Ontario continues to be our mission – including to those who need additional support, counseling or adapted access.

This approach together with regular testing for those not vaccinated as set out in Directive #6 and a booster mRNA dose for some of our most vulnerable populations are Ontario's best defence for at risk populations heading into the fall. I want to again thank you and your teams for your continued effort and dedication to the people of Ontario.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Chief Medical Officer of Health

c: Helen Angus, Deputy Minister of Health  
Nancy Matthews, Deputy Minister of Long-Term Care  
Denise Cole, Deputy Minister for Seniors and Accessibility  
Dr Dirk Huyer, Clinical Guidance and Surveillance, Workstream Vaccine Distribution Task Force  
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery Division  
Erin Hannah, Associate Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Pandemic Response  
Patrick Dicerni, Assistant Deputy Minister & Executive Officer, Drugs and Devices Division  
Peter Kaftarian, Assistant Deputy Minister, Hospitals and Capital Division