

October 5, 2021

## Alberta COVID-19 Immunization Program Update

Dear colleagues,

I would like to update you with some important information about COVID-19 immunization.

- Starting October 6, 2021 third doses of COVID-19 vaccine will be made available with a minimum spacing between the second and third dose of six months for the following high risk individuals:
  - All seniors 75 years of age and older, and:
  - All First Nations, Métis and Inuit adults 65 years of age and older, no matter where they live in Alberta.

More information on these changes is included below.

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind you that influenza vaccinations will begin in the week of October 18, 2021. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) released new recommendations on September 28, 2021 indicating that COVID-19 vaccines can now be co-administered with, or given before or after other vaccines with no minimum spacing, including influenza vaccine.

Thank you for your efforts to support the COVID-19 Immunization Program through patient counseling, vaccine provision for those involved, and immunization for you and your teams.

Yours sincerely,

Deena Hinshaw, BSc, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCP  
Chief Medical Officer of Health

## Overview

- A complete two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series provides strong protection against COVID-19 infection and severe outcomes, [including against the Delta variant](#), in most of the general population.
- However, a third dose may be required to provide stronger protection for those who may have a suboptimal or waning immune response to the first two doses, which puts them at increased risk of severe COVID-19 infection.
- To continue protecting Alberta's most vulnerable populations, as recommended by the Alberta Advisory Committee on Immunization, the province is expanding eligibility criteria for a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and making third doses available to those at highest-risk of breakthrough infection and severe outcomes from breakthrough infection.
- An mRNA vaccine should be administered as the third dose except in the event of contraindication or refusal. When possible, it is preferred that the third dose be the same mRNA vaccine as that received in the initial series. If the initial series was a mixed mRNA vaccine series, either mRNA vaccine can be administered.
- Side effects and adverse events: currently available clinical evidence indicates that side effects reported after an additional dose were similar to previous doses, and mostly mild or moderate. No increase in serious adverse events has been reported after administration of a third dose.
- Alberta will continue enhanced surveillance of Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) and Adverse Events of Special Interest (AESI), including those related to additional doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Health care professionals are reminded of their critical role and mandated responsibility to report adverse events following immunization that meet Alberta's definition of an AEFI or AESI. For information on what needs to be reported and when, go to: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page16187.aspx>.
- Alberta will continue to monitor evidence as it becomes available and if warranted, additional doses may be recommended for other populations in future.

## Third dose for seniors aged 75 years and older

### Recommendation:

- All seniors aged 75 years and older who have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine are now eligible for a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine at a minimum of a six month interval from the second dose.

### Current evidence and rationale

- Age is a significant risk factor for severe COVID-19 disease outcomes such as hospitalization, ICU admission and death.

- Emerging evidence suggests that vaccine effectiveness against all infection and symptomatic infection appears to wane with time, particularly in the elderly population and with a shorter interval between doses.
- Seniors 75 years of age and older received their COVID-19 vaccines early in the vaccine roll-out (phase 1).
- Growing numbers of breakthrough COVID-19 cases in fully vaccinated individuals are of increasing concern in Alberta, especially in adults over 75 years as severe outcomes such as hospitalization and deaths have been seen in some breakthrough cases in this older age group.
  - Data on breakthrough infections and COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness in Alberta can be found at [COVID-19 Alberta statistics | alberta.ca](https://www.alberta.ca/COVID-19-Alberta-statistics).
- Early evidence shows that short-term vaccine effectiveness of a booster dose against infection and severe illness is very good.

#### Booking a third dose:

- All eligible seniors can book appointments to receive an additional dose of vaccine by calling 811 or [booking online](#) beginning on October 6, 2021.
- Those deemed ineligible due to their age, or less than six months has passed since receiving their second dose, will be asked to re-book when eligible.

## Third dose for First Nations, Métis and Inuit adults 65 years and older

#### Recommendation:

- All First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) aged 65 years and older no matter where they live in Alberta who have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine are now eligible for a third dose at a minimum of a six month interval from the second dose.

#### Current evidence and rationale

- Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, FNMI peoples have had a higher rate of severe outcomes, and a younger average age at death. They are almost twice as likely as the non-indigenous population to need hospital care for COVID-19. For example, as of September 27, 2021:
  - The average age of death from COVID-19 infection in the FNMI population is 65 years, whereas in the general population it is 79 years.
- FNMI adults 65 years of age and older received their COVID-19 vaccines early in the vaccine roll-out (phase 1).
- Preliminary Alberta data showed that breakthrough infection rates for fully immunized FNMI adults aged 65 and older were higher than in FNMI adults under 65 years. The rate of

severe outcomes from breakthrough infections is much higher in FNMI adults over 65 than non-FNMI adults in the same age group.

- Published FN COVID-19 data can be found on the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre:  
[http://www.afnigc.ca/main/includes/media/html\\_files/First\\_Nations\\_COVID19\\_Dashboard\\_Alberta2021-09-15\\_13-08.html](http://www.afnigc.ca/main/includes/media/html_files/First_Nations_COVID19_Dashboard_Alberta2021-09-15_13-08.html)

#### Booking a third dose:

- Off reserve: All eligible FNMI people can book appointments to receive an additional dose of vaccine by calling 811 or [booking online](#) beginning on October 6, 2021.
- Those deemed ineligible due to their age, or less than six months has passed since receiving their second dose, will be asked to re-book when eligible.
- On reserve: Those living on-reserve can receive vaccine through local health care providers.

### Clinical considerations for all seniors 75 years of age and over and First Nations, Métis and Inuit adults aged 65 and older

- Before receiving the third dose, while it is not required to do so, eligible individuals may wish to consult with their healthcare provider about any advantages or disadvantages of receiving an additional dose of vaccine.
- As with all vaccine administration, immunizers must receive informed consent from the person requesting an additional dose prior to immunization to ensure they understand the benefits versus risks of additional doses.
- It is important for health care professionals to support and encourage patients/clients to continue to maintain COVID-19 disease prevention measures such as masking and physical distancing even after a third dose. Household members and close relatives of these individuals should be encouraged to receive the primary series of COVID-19 vaccine, if they haven't already.
- Serologic testing or cellular immunity testing to assess immune response and guide clinical care (e.g., need for an additional dose) are not recommended at this time.
- On September 28, 2021, NACI released recommendations indicating that COVID-19 vaccines may be given at the same time as, or any time before or after, other vaccines, including live, non-live, adjuvanted or unadjuvanted vaccines. The full recommendation statement can be found here: [Summary of National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\) statement: Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines - Canada.ca](#)