

What You Need to Know About the Third Dose of the COVID-19 Vaccine

For Princess Margaret patients and their families

Read this brochure to learn about:

- Why some people need a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine
- Who is eligible to get a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine*
- When should eligible patients get the third dose
- Which vaccines can be used for a third dose
- How eligible patients can get the third dose

***See page 4 to fill out a checklist to know if you are eligible for the third dose.**

Information about COVID-19 is changing quickly. The information presented here is accurate as of the date of this brochure. If information changes, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre will update patients as soon as possible.

Why do some people need a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine?

For a vaccine to protect you, it must trigger your immune system. In some patients who have a moderately or severely weakened immune system, this ability is impaired. A third dose can strengthen the immune response.

While most people do not need a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine right now, the Ministry of Health has advised a third dose for a small group of people.

Based on this advice, Princess Margaret patients who are at risk of an incomplete immune response from two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, can get a third dose.

You may have read or heard about a “booster dose” of the COVID-19 vaccine. The third dose is not a booster dose. It is an extra dose for people who have a moderately or severely weakened immune system.

Who is eligible for a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Cancer patients who are eligible to get the third dose are those getting active treatment for

- a solid tumour
- malignant hematological conditions (cancers that affect the blood, bone marrow or lymph nodes or both)

Patients must be getting treatment that can cause a moderate to severe weakened immune system.

Patients include those who:

- are getting chemotherapy, targeted therapy, or immunotherapy, and patients with a solid tumour who finished treatment within the last 3 months
- have blood cancer or bone marrow failure disorder and are getting treatment now or have finished treatment within the last 6 months. Blood cancers include leukemia, myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS), myeloproliferative neoplasms (MPN), lymphoma, myeloma, and Chronic Myeloid Leukemia (CML)
- were initially vaccinated during or within 12 months after treatment with anti-CD20 agents (for example, rituximab, ocrelizumab, ofatumumab)
- had an allogeneic stem cell transplant (using stem cells from another person) within the last 2 years or still take medicines to suppress the immune system (for example: steroids, cyclosporin, tacrolimus, sirolimus, azathioprine, mycophenolate mofetil, ruxolitinib, imatinib, or ibrutinib)
- had an autologous stem cell transplant (stem cells from yourself) within the last 2 years
- had CAR-T cell therapy within the last 2 years
- are getting active treatment with the following types of medicines that weaken the immune system:
 - anti-B cell therapies (monoclonal antibodies targeting CD19, CD20 and CD22, for example, rituximab)
 - high-dose systemic corticosteroids (for example, prednisone)
 - alkylating agents (for example, cyclophosphamide)
 - antimetabolites (for example, methotrexate)
 - tumour-necrosis factor (TNF) inhibitors (for example, infliximab)
 - other biologic medicines that suppress the immune system
- live in a long-term care home, retirement home, or First Nations elder care lodge

At this time, patients getting therapy that does not suppress the immune system are not eligible for the third dose, for example, patients getting only hormone therapy or radiation therapy.

All patients eligible for a third dose must have had two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

To ensure the best immune response to the third dose, experts recommend that patients discuss the best timing of the third dose with their doctor.

See page 4 to fill out a checklist to know if you are eligible for the third dose.

When should eligible patients get a third dose?

If you are eligible, you can receive a third dose 8 weeks (or 56 days) after your second dose.

Which vaccines can be used for a third dose?

You will get a third dose of an mRNA vaccine (either Pfizer or Moderna). You will get the same brand of vaccine as your second dose, if possible. Mixing mRNA vaccines is allowed at this time.

If you got an AstraZeneca (also called COVISHIELD) COVID-19 vaccine for your first and second dose, the Ministry of Health suggests you get an mRNA vaccine for your third dose.

If you cannot have an mRNA vaccine (for example, allergies to the ingredients in the vaccine), you may be offered an AstraZeneca (COVISHIELD) vaccine.

How can I get my third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine ?

You can get your third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at your local pharmacy or vaccine clinic. You will need a referral form stating that you are eligible for a third dose.

To get a copy of this form, call your doctor's office at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. To find this number, check the clinic contact sheet that was provided to you. Or you can find clinic numbers online at: <https://www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret/Clinics>

If you have an upcoming clinic visit, you can get your referral form then.

After getting a third dose, what more should I do to protect myself?

Even after the third dose, people with weakened immune systems must take care to protect themselves from COVID-19. You should:

- Wear a mask
- Stay 6 feet apart from others you do not live with
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces
- Encourage your close contacts to get vaccinated
- Avoid being indoors with unvaccinated people

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, get tested and contact your doctor.

Should people who have a normal immune system get a third COVID-19 vaccine dose?

Not at this time. The vaccines remain very effective against severe COVID-19 for those who do not have a weakened immune system. In the future, third doses may be advised for more people because immune protection from the vaccine tends to weaken over time. In addition, as new variants of COVID-19 emerge, new vaccines may be needed to protect against them.

Checklist

Answer the questions below to know if you are eligible for a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

1. Have you had two doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccine?
 - Yes
 - No

If **Yes**, answer question 2.

If **No**, you are not eligible for a third dose. Talk to your doctor about getting the two-dose COVID-19 vaccine.

2. Do you meet any of the criteria below? Check all that apply:
 - I am getting chemotherapy, targeted therapy or immunotherapy now or had a solid tumour and finished treatment within the last 3 months
 - I have blood cancer or bone marrow failure disorder and am getting treatment now or have finished treatment within the last 6 months. Blood cancers include leukemia, myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS), myeloproliferative neoplasms (MPN), lymphoma, and myeloma, and Chronic Myeloid Leukemia (CML)
 - I was initially vaccinated during or within 12 months after treatment with anti-CD20 agents (for example, rituximab, ocrelizumab, ofatumumab)
 - I had an allogeneic stem cell transplant (using stem cells from another person) within the last 2 years or I am still taking medicines to suppress my immune system (for example: steroids, cyclosporin, tacrolimus, sirolimus, azathioprine, mycophenolate mofetil, ruxolitinib, imatinib, or ibrutinib)
 - I had an autologous stem cell transplant (stem cells from yourself) within the last 2 years
 - I had CAR-T cell therapy within the last 2 years
 - I am getting active treatment with the following types of medicines that suppress the immune system:
 - anti-B cell therapies (monoclonal antibodies targeting CD19, CD20 and CD22, for example, rituximab)
 - high-dose systemic corticosteroids (for example, prednisone)
 - alkylating agents (for example, cyclophosphamide)

- antimetabolites (for example, methotrexate)
- tumour-necrosis factor (TNF) inhibitors (for example, infliximab)
- other biologic medicines that suppress the immune system
- I live in a long-term care home, retirement home, or First Nations elder care lodge

If you are unsure about any of the questions above, talk to your doctor.

If you checked any of the choices above, answer question 3.

If you did not select any of the choices above, you are not eligible for a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine right now.

3. I am (check all that apply):

- Within 6 months of getting CD20 antibody treatment (for example: rituximab, ocrelizumab, ofatumumab, obinutuzumab)
- Aware that I had a reaction to PEG-asparaginase in the past

If you checked any of the choices above in question 3, talk to your doctor about whether you can get the third dose and the best timing for you to get the third dose. The reason behind this is that the above-listed conditions could reduce the effect of the third dose or be too risky for you.

If you did **not select any of the choices in question 3**, follow the steps outlined on page 3 to book your third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

For more information, call the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre Information line at: 416 946 4559.