

COVID-19: information for solid organ transplant recipients

UPDATED: October 26, 2023

The fall 2023 COVID-19 and flu vaccination program is rolling out now. Priority populations include people with chronic health conditions such as organ transplant. Invitations to book appointments for COVID-19 and flu vaccines will start going out by October 10. At this time, mRNA vaccine is still the preferred Covid-19 vaccine for transplant patients.

COVID-19 continues to circulate in British Columbia. BC Transplant and the transplant clinical teams strongly recommend patients getting fully vaccinated and receiving an additional vaccine dose against COVID-19.

If you test positive for COVID-19, please let your transplant team know. Transplant recipients are among the patient groups who have priority access to COVID-19 treatments in BC.

Transplant recipients are also **strongly advised** to get a flu shot, which is available and free for everyone 6 months and older in BC – find a clinic near you (<https://immunizebc.ca/clinics/flu>) for locations and times. You can receive a flu vaccine at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccine, if that is convenient for you.

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1. Getting vaccinated

All pre- and post-transplant patients are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated against COVID-19, and get additional vaccine doses as they become available.

A complete primary vaccine series for solid organ transplant recipients involves **three doses** of COVID-19 vaccine. Three doses of vaccine offer better protection for people who are immunocompromised. A three-dose series is safe and recommended for transplant recipients who have never been vaccinated. If you were vaccinated before your transplant, you may have only received two doses and that is acceptable.

Transplant recipients (age 6 months and up) may have also received an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine approximately six months after the third dose of the primary vaccine series and is highly recommended to get an additional 2023 fall COVID-19 vaccine dose this fall.

Fall 2023 COVID-19 Additional COVID-19 Vaccine Dose

An additional vaccine dose starting in the fall of 2023 is expected to increase protection against SARS-CoV-2 infection and COVID-19 symptomatic and severe disease that has waned since the last COVID-19 vaccination or SARS-CoV-2 infection.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends patients to wait at least 6 months after their last dose to get another dose. **Patients who are considering getting an additional dose during the summer of 2023 should know that this will likely delay their receipt of the fall 2023 COVID-19 vaccine.**

For the pediatric population, an additional dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for age five years and older, at least six months after the primary series. ([COVID-19 vaccines for children and youth | Immunize BC](#))

If you recently had COVID-19, you should wait at least six months to get your additional COVID-19 vaccine dose.

Register with www.getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca or the BC Vaccine Line (call 1-833-838-2323) to be notified when to book each vaccine dose.

The BCCDC has the most current information about [getting a vaccine](#).

2. COVID-19, vaccines and transplant recipients

- Solid organ transplant recipients continue to be at risk of severe diseases from COVID-19. If you have not received an additional dose in the spring yet, we **strongly recommend** getting an additional COVID-19 vaccine dose this fall so you are protected as we head into the cold and flu season. This is in line with NACI, which strongly **recommends an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine beginning in the fall of 2023 for those previously vaccinated against COVID-19. The updated vaccine will help protect against the latest variants.** Recipients of three or four mRNA COVID-19 vaccine doses receive much better protection against infection with the Omicron variant than those who received only two doses.
- Additional COVID-19 vaccine doses in the fall will be formulations **updated** to target more recent SARS-CoV-2 variants. Individuals vaccinated with the updated formulation are expected to benefit from a better immune response against these variants compared to current vaccines.
- COVID-19 vaccination of solid organ transplant recipients will help reduce their risk of severe disease that could potentially result in hospitalization and death.
- Solid organ transplant recipients can get a **flu vaccine at the same time** as their additional COVID-19 vaccine dose. It has been shown that COVID-19 vaccines may be given concurrently (i.e., same day), or at any time before or after non-COVID-19 vaccines. COVID-19 and flu vaccines are expected to be available at pharmacies and vaccination clinics around BC starting this fall. ([Influenza \(flu\) vaccine | Immunize BC](#))
- An additional dose of vaccine starting this fall is particularly important for those who have not been previously infected and have protection from vaccination alone. Even if you have previously been infected, **protection against infection will decrease over time.** There are no known safety risks with receiving a vaccine after a recent SARS-CoV-2 infection.

You will still need to be vigilant and continue to assess your own level of risk tolerance for choosing activities and interactions within the guidelines set out by Public Health. The [BCCDC's Personal Toolkit](https://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks) is a good resource for considering what tools to use and when for preventing COVID-19 (<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks>).



3. COVID-19 treatments for transplant recipients

Transplant recipients are among the patient groups who have priority access to COVID-19 treatments in BC. The **medications should be started within five to seven days** of experiencing signs and symptoms of infection. You will also need a positive COVID-19 test to be eligible.

- If you develop [cold or flu-like symptoms](#), you should get tested for COVID-19 as soon as possible (rapid antigen or PCR).
- If you test positive, contact your transplant care team as soon as possible. They will determine if you might benefit from available treatments.
- If you are eligible, the preferred, most effective and safer treatment (Remdesivir) for transplant patients requires three days of intravenous (IV) infusions at a health authority infusion facility. Your transplant care team will work with the health authority where you live to ensure you receive it.
- Paxlovid is an oral COVID-19 treatment available in BC; however, it is **not recommended for transplant patients** because it interacts with transplant medications.

This document is current as of August 21, 2023. Check the BC Transplant or the BCCDC website for the most current available information and updates.