



Fall 2022 COVID-19 Vaccine Boosters in BC

July 2022

Background

Starting in September 2022, all British Columbians aged 12 and over will be invited to receive their second COVID-19 vaccine booster dose (fourth dose overall) as part of a provincewide immunization plan based on guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI).ⁱ Similar to BC's first booster program which commenced in October 2021, British Columbians will receive an invitation when it is their time to schedule an appointment for the next dose. However, new to the September 2022 program, British Columbians may expect to receive updated versions of a COVID-19 vaccine, adapted to better protect against Omicron variants.ⁱⁱ Such adapted vaccines as those produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have already demonstrated robust protection in clinical trials, and are currently expected to be approved for use by Health Canada and distributed to provinces in time for September rollout.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 2021, the vast majority of British Columbians rolled up their sleeves to receive their first two doses of COVID-19 vaccine in a mass effort to help reduce community transmission, protect their health and the health of their loved ones, and 'flatten the curve' in terms of COVID-19 cases. At that time, two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine offered very good protection against serious illness caused by the virus. As of July 2022, more than 84% of British Columbians have received at least the initial series of two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine approved for use in Canada.^{iv} However, immunity naturally goes down with time, and viruses such as COVID-19 continue to develop new variants which pose additional risk to our health. As such, it is critical that British Columbians continue to receive the necessary doses of vaccine to give the immune system the 'boost' it needs to maintain a sufficient level of protection against new variants of the virus as they evolve.

However, as of July 2022, only approximately 59% of British Columbians over the age of 12 have received their first booster dose (third dose overall) of a COVID-19 vaccine.^v Especially with the prevalence of the Omicron variant and its highly transmissible subvariants (e.g., BA.1, BA.2, BA.2.12.1, BA.4, BA.5, etc.) and as we head into influenza season where other viruses and bacteria will begin to spread, it is essential that British Columbians do all they can to support their immune systems and protect against further spread of illness. As such, those who have not yet received their first booster dose are urged to do so as soon as possible in order to stay up to date with their protection.^{vi} As well, receiving a second booster dose in the fall (six months after the first booster) will provide the best, most reliable form of protection for individuals and our communities.

Nonetheless, there has been some confusion surrounding the announcement of this booster vaccination campaign. While the province announced that these fourth doses (second boosters) would become available to British Columbians aged 18 and over in the fall, health officials also stated that any adults who had received their third dose at least six months' prior could opt to receive a fourth dose sooner, should they choose.^{vii} As well, many British Columbians received public health text and email alerts this summer, stating that those who feel they have 'unique needs' may get their booster sooner (people have been advised to phone 1-833-838-2323 to discuss these unique needs).^{viii} However, health officials have noted that they 'encourage' British Columbians to wait until September instead. This messaging has been confusing for many, especially in the midst of another wave of cases caused by newer Omicron subvariants. Similarly, there has been some discrepancy in the information posted on various websites concerning second booster doses in BC,^{ix} which may further confuse British Columbians about the timing of their next vaccine. Moreover, there have been anecdotal reports of people attempting to book a fourth dose now, only to be told they are unable to do so. Additionally, others have reported that the process by which to book a fourth dose has been cumbersome (anecdotally).

It is important to note that eligibility for a second booster or fourth dose also ranges across the provinces and territories. As of mid-July, the provinces and territories are offering second boosters (fourth doses) as follows:^x



Note that 'booster doses' for the general population are not equivalent to 'third/fourth doses' for those who are immunocompromised or immunosuppressed. The terminology 'first booster (third dose)' and 'second booster (fourth dose)' is used in this section for clarity, and different provinces and territories may employ different vaccination guidelines for those who are immunocompromised or immunosuppressed.

- Alberta: Second boosters (fourth doses) are currently available to the general population aged 70 and over, Indigenous peoples aged 65 and over, and all seniors living in congregate-care settings, regardless of age.
- Manitoba: Second boosters (fourth doses) are available to the general population aged 50 and over, Indigenous peoples 30 and over, residents in personal care homes and seniors in congregate living settings of any age, and individuals who are moderately to severely immunocompromised between the ages of 18 and 49.
- New Brunswick: All residents aged 18 and over are eligible to receive their second booster (fourth dose) five months after their first booster (third dose) as of July 12.
- Newfoundland and Labrador: Second boosters (fourth doses) are available to anyone aged 50 and over, Indigenous peoples aged 18 and over, or those who live in remote or isolated Indigenous communities aged 18 and over as of July 20.
- Northwest Territories: Second boosters (fourth doses) are available to those aged 50 and over and those aged 12 and over who are immunocompromised, at least six months after the first booster (third dose).
- Nova Scotia: Those aged 50 and over are eligible to receive second boosters (fourth doses) 168 days after receiving their first booster (third dose), and residents in long-term care and congregate living settings, Indigenous peoples over the age of 55, and immunocompromised individuals aged 50 and over may receive their second booster 120 days after the first.
- Nunavut: Individuals aged 18 and over are currently eligible to receive their second booster (fourth dose) if it has been 4½ months since their first booster (third dose). Some age groups are prioritized in certain areas.
- Ontario: Second boosters (fourth doses) are available to all adults between the ages of 18 and 59 who had their first booster (third dose) at least five months prior or who were infected with COVID-19 three months prior.
- Prince Edward Island: Second boosters (fourth doses) are currently available to all residents aged 12 and over.
- Quebec: All residents aged 18 and over are currently eligible to receive their second booster (fourth dose). Those aged 60 and over and with underlying medical conditions are 'prioritized', but any adults may receive their second booster at this time.
- Saskatchewan: Second boosters (fourth doses) are available to all residents aged 50 and over, four months after their first booster (third dose).
- Yukon: In early July, Yukon announced that all residents 18 and over are eligible to receive their second booster (fourth dose) six months after their first booster (third dose) as of July 13.

Ultimately, while the messaging in BC may be complex at this time, British Columbians who are particularly interested in receiving a second booster sooner may receive it six months after receiving their first booster (third dose overall). Those who wish to wait for the potential of an Omicron-specific booster available in September may do so. Over the past few months there have been reports of BC residents crossing the border to Washington state to receive additional booster doses,^{xi} which may have prompted public health officials to make second boosters available earlier. Either way, epidemiologists consistently agree that the original two-dose vaccination series is no longer sufficient for protection, and that at least three doses are necessary as a foundation for protection, with additional boosters to maintain protection thereafter.^{xii}



As leaders in public health, infection prevention and control, and as the largest group of immunizers in Canada, nurses know the importance of receiving necessary vaccinations in order to maintain a sufficient level of protection against serious illness and to prevent severe health outcomes such as hospitalization and death. While the vast majority of British Columbians received their initial two-dose series of a COVID-19 vaccine in 2021, nurses know that immunity decreases with time, and especially with new variants of the virus in circulation, receiving additional 'booster' doses is critical. As epidemiology supports, receiving the first three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine is urgently important. While British Columbians may decide whether to receive their second booster now or wait until September, nurses know that ensuring people remain up to date with their vaccine series is imperative in maintaining adequate protection against COVID-19. As many nurses work directly with patients, clients, and communities, nurses are ideally positioned to help educate and inform on the importance of regular immunizations and other public health measures, and to share evidence-informed information from reliable sources.

Key Messages

- Starting in September 2022, all British Columbians over the age of 12 will be eligible to receive their second COVID-19 booster doses (fourth doses overall) at least six months after their first booster.
- British Columbians can expect to receive an invitation to schedule their second booster dose when they become eligible.
- In the fall 2022 vaccination program, British Columbians may expect to receive updated mRNA vaccines that have been adapted to better protect against Omicron variants.
- While more than 84% of British Columbians received their initial two-dose series of a COVID-19 vaccine, only approximately 59% have received their first booster (third dose overall); those who have not yet received their first booster are urged to do so as soon as possible to maintain adequate protection.
- All British Columbians over the age of 12 are strongly encouraged to receive their second booster when it becomes available to them in the fall in order to maintain protection against COVID-19 and to protect against serious illness and severe health outcomes.
- Since the announcement of a fall booster campaign, some of the messaging around when to receive second boosters has been confusing, as adults may opt to get their second booster now but are encouraged to wait until the fall for the potential of an Omicron-specific vaccine.
- As booster campaigns have rolled out at different intervals across the country, many in BC may feel uncertain of the best timing to receive their next booster dose.
- As leaders in public health and the largest group of immunizers in Canada, nurses know the importance of receiving a regular schedule of vaccinations in order to provide the most reliable form of protection against illness.
- Nurses continue to play an important role as frontline care providers throughout COVID-19 and are integral to communicating evidence-informed guidance and information to the public.

Further Reading/Resources

- [NNPBC: Why It's Important to Get Your COVID-19 Vaccine Booster](#)
- [NNPBC: Guide to COVID-19 Vaccines and What to Expect](#)
- [Province of BC: Get ready for fall 2022](#)
- [Province of BC: Get a COVID-19 booster](#)
- [BC Centre for Disease Control: COVID-19 Vaccinations: Healthcare Provider Q&A: Second booster dose](#)



- [ImmunizeBC: Who should get a second booster of a COVID-19 vaccine?](#)
- [National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\): Interim guidance on planning considerations for a fall 2022 COVID-19 vaccine booster program in Canada](#)

ⁱ BC Ministry of Health. *BC Gov News*. 'B.C.'s COVID-19 immunization plan continues with fall boosters.' July 8, 2022. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022HLTH0162-001088>.

ⁱⁱ BC Ministry of Health. *B.C.'s COVID-19 immunization plan continues with fall boosters*. July 8, 2022.

ⁱⁱⁱ Public Health Agency of Canada. 'National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI): Meetings.' Updated 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/meetings.html>;

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Neergaard, Lauran, Associated Press. Global News. 'Moderna aims for fall release of COVID-19 Omicron vaccine.' April 19, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8768889/moderna-omicron-covid-19-vaccine-fall-release/>;

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^{iv} Little, Noah. 'COVID-19 Tracker Canada: British Columbia Vaccination Data.' Updated 2022. <https://covid19tracker.ca/provincevac.html?p=BC>.

^v BC Ministry of Health. *B.C.'s COVID-19 immunization plan continues with fall boosters*. July 8, 2022.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Daflos, Penny. CTV News. 'A dilemma': 'Muddled messaging from B.C. health officials compounds booster availability confusion.' July 12, 2022. <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/a-dilemma-muddled-messaging-from-b-c-health-officials-compounds-booster-availability-confusion-1.5985343>.

^{viii} Daflos, Penny. CTV News. *A dilemma: Muddled messaging from BC health officials compounds booster confusion*. July 12, 2022.

^{ix} Daflos, Penny. CTV News. 'COVID-19 booster confusion within B.C. public health agencies promoting conflicting information.' July 14, 2022. <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/covid-19-booster-confusion-within-b-c-public-health-agencies-promoting-conflicting-information-1.5988043>.

^x Benchetrit, Jenna. CBC News. 'Who is eligible for a 4th COVID-19 vaccine dose? A province-by-province breakdown.' July 13, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/fourth-dose-eligibility-1.6518082>.

^{xi} Weichel, Andrew. CTV News. 'B.C. residents cross border for 2nd booster in Washington state.' May 17, 2022. <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/mobile/border-crossing-for-boosters-some-frustrated-b-c-residents-heading-to-u-s-for-more-vaccine-1.5906947>.

^{xii} Daflos, Penny. CTV News. *A dilemma: Muddled messaging from BC health officials compounds booster confusion*. July 12, 2022.