

SUBJECT: Third Dose Recommendations for Immunocompromised Patients
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To: Primary Care Providers, Hospitals Long-Term Care, Retirement Homes
From: Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health

Select groups of immunocompromised individuals are now eligible to receive a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine in Ontario. Consider which of your patients meet the provincial eligibility criteria and would benefit from a third vaccine dose and arrange to have them immunized.

If you are unable to administer vaccine to your eligible patients, you may refer them to be immunized at a Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) clinic beginning on Monday, August 23, 2021.

Background

On August 17, 2021, Ontario's Vaccine Clinical Advisory Group (VCAG) recommended that a third dose of an approved COVID-19 vaccine be offered to select populations of immunocompromised patients.¹ These populations include:

- 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).

Severely immunocompromised patients are less likely to mount a robust antibody response to a standard (two-dose) vaccine series.² Several recent studies have found that many of these individuals benefit from a third dose.^{3,4,5} These additional doses appear to be well tolerated, with symptoms following immunization similar to previous doses.²

Clinical Considerations

The VCAG recommends that prior to offering a third dose of vaccine, clinicians engage in a collaborative decision-making process with their patients which includes consideration of:

1. The risks and benefits of a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine;
2. The potential risks /consequences of COVID-19;
3. The risk of acquiring COVID-19 following the completion of a two-dose vaccine schedule, and;

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4. The limited evidence or absence of evidence for the use of a third dose of the currently available COVID-19 vaccines.¹

While evidence regarding the use of third vaccine doses is limited, WDGPH is aware of the following resources that may assist you in discussions with your patients:

- [COVID-19 Vaccination Recommendations for Special Populations](#), from Ontario's Ministry of Health (Aug 17, 2021);
- [Evidence to Recommendations Framework: Additional doses of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines as a part of a primary series for immunocompromised people](#), from Dr. Kathleen Dooling (CDC) (Aug 13, 2021);
- [Clinical considerations for use of additional doses of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines as part of a primary vaccine series for immunocompromised people](#), from Dr. Neela Goswami (CDC) (Aug 13, 2021);
- [Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines: Special Populations](#), from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) (Jul 22, 2021);
- [Immunization of immunocompromised persons](#), from the Canadian Immunization Guide (May 2018).

Note that third doses for eligible patients should be considered as an addition to the primary series (i.e., not as a booster dose). Additionally, this constitutes an off-label use of the vaccine.

A third dose should be provided using an approved mRNA vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna). Where possible, an eligible patient should receive the same vaccine product; however, a different mRNA vaccine can be used.¹

According to VCAG guidance, eligible patients should receive their third dose at least two months after their second dose. Immunization should be timed to optimize the patient's immune response and to minimize delays in the management of their underlying condition.¹ A vaccine series should ideally be completed at least two weeks before initiation of immunosuppressive therapies where possible.⁶

Regardless of whether an immunocompromised individual receives a third dose, they should continue to follow recommended public health measures for COVID-19.^{1,6} Anyone who comes into close contact with an immunocompromised individual (i.e. family, friends, caregivers) is strongly recommended to be vaccinated.

Ordering and Administering Vaccine

Primary care providers and specialists who are familiar with their patients' medical histories are best positioned to identify and immunize eligible clients. Consider which of your patients meet the provincial eligibility criteria and would benefit from a third vaccine dose. WDGPH will be sending more information in the coming days about how to document a third dose in COVax.

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Continue to order COVID-19 vaccine using our online order forms:

- [Moderna COVID-19 Order Form](#)
- [Pfizer COVID-19 Order Form](#)

If you need to order vaccine in single-dose syringes, complete WDGPH's [single-dose order form](#). Please note that you must have already completed WDGPH's training and onboarding process and must have a signed memorandum of understanding on file.

If you are unable to administer vaccine to your eligible patients, you may refer them to be immunized at a WDGPH clinic. WDGPH will begin vaccinating these patients Monday, August 23, 2021. To have your patients vaccinated:

1. Complete and sign the attached referral form and provide a copy to your patient. **Your patient must bring a copy of the signed form with them to their appointment.**
2. Direct them to book an appointment at a WDGPH clinic: wdgpublichealth.ca/appointments. Alternatively, patients may drop-in without an appointment. Clinic dates, locations and times are available on WDGPH's website- wdgpublichealth.ca/drop-ins.
3. If you fax a signed and completed referral form to 1-855-934-5463, WDGPH will contact your patient directly to book them into a clinic.

Third Doses for Other Populations

On August 17, the VCAG also recommended that a third vaccine dose be offered to residents of long-term care homes, high-risk retirement homes, and First Nations elder care lodges.¹ WDGPH will be working directly with these facilities to ensure that third doses are made available.

Please be advised that the populations listed above are, at present, the only groups eligible for a third vaccine dose in Ontario. Any further recommendations from VCAG or NACI will be shared as they become available.

References:

1. Ontario Ministry of Health. COVID-19 vaccination recommendations for special populations. August 17, 2021. Available at: https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/COVID-19_vaccination_rec_special_populations.pdf
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Evidence to recommendation framework. August 13, 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/meetings/downloads/slides-2021-08-13/02-COVID-Dooling-508.pdf>

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5. Hall VG, Ferreira VH, Ku T, Ierullo M, Majchrzak-Kita B, Chaparro C, Selzner N, Schiff J, McDonald M, Tomlinson G, Kulasingam V. Randomized trial of a third dose of mRNA-1273 vaccine in transplant recipients. New England Journal of Medicine. 2021 Aug 11. Available at: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2111462>
6. Government of Canada. Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines. July 22, 2021. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines.html>

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