

# **Canadian Research Says that Paxlovid Offers High-Risk COVID-19 Patients Protection Against Hospital Admissions**

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Since December 12, pharmacists have been able to prescribe Paxlovid either in-person or virtually (such as by telephone) at no cost ([source](#)). This change has made it more convenient to access care ([source](#)).

This past Monday, a Canadian research study published its findings that Paxlovid has continued to protect higher-risk individuals against COVID-related hospital admissions and death even after the Omicron variant was in circulation ([source](#)).

This is important because most of the research that has been done about the effectiveness of Paxlovid was done before Omicron was widespread and before most people had access to COVID-19 vaccines and boosters ([source](#)). The study was published in a trustworthy academic journal: the Canadian Medical Association Journal ([source](#)).

### **What is Paxlovid?**

Paxlovid is an antiviral medication that is considered to be the most effective treatment for reducing severe outcomes for people with mild COVID-19 infections ([source](#)).

The WHO strongly recommends using Paxlovid for patients who are at high risk of hospitalization and have mild or moderate COVID-19 ([source](#)).

It's in the form of pills that you take by mouth ([source](#)). To get it, you need to be eligible and get a prescription ([source](#)).

You can only use Paxlovid if you start taking it within 5 days of when you started getting symptoms ([source](#)).

### **How did the study get to this conclusion?**

The study defines “higher-risk individuals” as people who are 70 and older and/or people who had underlying medical conditions ([source](#)). The study used Ontario health data to compare a group of these higher-risk patients who received Paxlovid with a group that did not receive Paxlovid ([source](#)).

In the group that did not receive Paxlovid, 3.7% of patients ended up in hospital or died ([source](#)). In comparison, in the group that did receive Paxlovid, 2.1% of patients ended up in

hospital or died ([source](#)). The authors of the research study determined that the drug is effective at preventing severe health outcomes for people who are at higher risk ([source](#)).

This study noted that newer COVID-19 variants that are very different from the original Omicron variant could make Paxlovid less effective, which is worrying as the pandemic evolves ([source](#)).

Dr. Mina Tadrous, who is one of the co-authors of this study, stated that this study shows that it makes sense to continue making Paxlovid available only to those who need it most rather than the general population ([source](#)). This way, the patients who need it most can continue to access it.

In fact, The Therapeutics Initiative at the University of British Columbia found that Paxlovid doesn't appear to have any benefits when taken by people at lower-risk of severe COVID-19 outcomes ([source](#)). This is another argument for not expanding Paxlovid's eligibility criteria. If it's too broad, it can expose people unnecessarily to a drug that could have side effects and will cost the health system money ([source](#)). This information by The Therapeutics Initiative comes from the Globe and Mail, which says that that organization's Therapeutics Letter will be published later this week ([source](#)).

## **So, who is eligible for Paxlovid?**

If you think you may be eligible, you can contact your local pharmacy to confirm if they prescribe Paxlovid and learn more about how to get a prescription for Paxlovid ([source](#)).

You are eligible for Paxlovid if you have:

- Symptoms that could be COVID-19
- A positive PCR test, rapid molecular test, or rapid antigen test (including rapid tests done at home)
- And if you are calling within five days of when you first started having symptoms ([source](#)).

You are eligible for Paxlovid if you are at higher risk for severe outcomes of COVID-19, which includes being:

- 60 years old or older
- 18 years old or older AND immunocompromised
- 18 to 59 years old AND at a higher risk of severe COVID-19 outcomes ([source](#)).

This includes having chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, heart or lung disease) OR inadequate immunity against COVID-19 (for example: 1. You are unvaccinated or you did not get two doses 2 ([source](#)). You got two doses and your last COVID-19 infection was more than 6 months ago and your last booster dose was more than 6 months ago) ([source](#)).

Use [this screening tool](#) to see if you are at higher risk. If you have complex health conditions, the pharmacist may tell you that you need to see your primary care provider (e.g., family doctor) or go to a clinical assessment centre for a Paxlovid prescription ([source](#)).

Some people can't take Paxlovid because it can interact with other medications ([source](#)). Also, it's important to note that people who receive dialysis treatment were not included in the clinical trials for Paxlovid ([source](#)). However, depending on other aspects of your health, it is still possible to get a prescription ([source](#)). **It's very important to speak with a doctor about what options are safe for you!**

If you are at higher risk, and you do not have a primary care provider, or if you are having difficulty accessing care:

- Call Health Connect Ontario at 811 (Toll-free TTY: 1-866-797-0007) OR
- Visit the Health Connect Ontario website (click [here](#)) to chat with a nurse online for more information on antiviral treatments, assistance or eligibility for virtual care options ([source](#)).

## **What about children?**

Antiviral medications are not often recommended for children who are younger than age 18 ([source](#)). Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis, such as for children who are severely immunocompromised and/or have multiple risk factors ([source](#)). Speak with a physician or nurse practitioner or contact a clinical assessment centre to learn more ([source](#)).

## **How do I get antiviral treatment?**

Even if you have mild symptoms of COVID-19, if you are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 outcomes, try to get tested and cared for as soon as you can ([source](#)).

Here are your options:

- Contact a pharmacist who is prescribing Paxlovid
- Visit a clinical assessment centre. This is where you can get tested, assessed and treated, or a Paxlovid prescription. (Click [here](#) to find a centre near you).
- Contact your primary care provider (e.g., your family doctor or nurse practitioner) or Health Connect Ontario ([source](#)).

You can use a rapid antigen test if you have one, but it's important to understand that these tests may be negative in the early stage of infection ([source](#)). If you don't have a rapid antigen test, or if your test result is negative, make plans to get a PCR test and clinical assessment as soon as possible ([source](#)).

If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at [www.ontario.ca/coronavirus](http://www.ontario.ca/coronavirus). Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Health Connect Ontario: 811

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675