

Paxlovid is Now Available at Ontario Pharmacies

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Most of this information is from an update by the Government of Ontario.

Click [here](#) to read the original article.

Information from other sources will be followed by hyperlinks.

The Ontario government announced that it will soon be easier to access Paxlovid!

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](#)).

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](#)).

What's changing?

At the moment, you can only get a Paxlovid prescription from a physician, a nurse practitioner, or at a clinical assessment centre.

Starting December 12, **pharmacists** will also be able to prescribe either in-person or virtually (such as by telephone). Getting this prescription will be free.

This change will make it more convenient to access care.

“This expansion of pharmacists’ scope of practice is just one more way our government is making it easier for Ontarians to access health care right in their own communities,” said Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Who is eligible for Paxlovid?

If you think you may be eligible, after December 12, you can contact your local pharmacy to confirm if they prescribe Paxlovid and learn more about how to get a prescription for Paxlovid. 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.

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.

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. 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.

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](#)).

Final Thoughts

Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health, said that allowing pharmacists to prescribe Paxlovid will make it easier for the most vulnerable to access medication as well as relieve pressure off of Ontario's hospitals.

Everyone in Ontario is strongly encouraged to get both their flu and COVID-19 shots as soon as possible to help restore protection that may have decreased since their last dose.

Remember that COVID-19 vaccines and flu shots are free and available to everyone who is six months old and older. Also, bivalent booster doses are free and available to everyone who is 12 years old and older.

Keeping up to date with vaccinations is still the best way for people to stay healthy this flu and respiratory illness season and prevent unnecessary visits to the hospital.

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at 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