

## Why the Second Dose Wait Time Changed

June 4, 2021

This document was prepared on June 4, 2021 by Natalie Garrison. Natalie works for North Yorkers for Disabled Persons as an Outreach Communication Facilitator, Information Referral and Resources Support. She can be reached at [natalie.nydp@gmail.com](mailto:natalie.nydp@gmail.com).

---

Across the country, many are wondering: Why do vaccine guidelines keep changing? First, most people needed to wait four months in between doses of COVID-19 vaccines, and we had to get the same vaccine for both doses. Now, the timeline has been moved up in some provinces, and it's okay to mix and match vaccines.

It goes without saying that all of these updates can be hard to follow. This article will answer how and why the second dose wait time changed.

First of all, who makes these guidelines? This group is Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). NACI's job is to review evidence about the best ways to use different vaccines, and then make recommendations to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).<sup>\*</sup> These recommendations are based on the best current scientific knowledge that is available.<sup>\*</sup> If the PHAC approves of NACI's recommendations, those recommendations are made available to healthcare providers.<sup>\*</sup>

NACI gives advice in the form of recommendations, not rules, which allows provinces to tailor their vaccination rollout campaigns and determine how to administer vaccines based on the number of available doses and the groups of people that are a priority for vaccination.<sup>\*</sup>

Throughout the pandemic, NACI has been changing its recommendations in response to a high volume of research studies that other countries are doing on COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>\*</sup> Initially, Health Canada authorized the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine to be given around 21 days after the first dose and the second dose of the Moderna vaccine within 28 days after the first dose.<sup>\*</sup> This is based on the guidance from the companies that made these vaccines.<sup>\*</sup>

On February 14, the provincial government said all second dose appointments for the Pfizer vaccine will be conducted within 35 days and no later than 42 days of receiving the first dose.<sup>\*</sup> This was done because there was a limited supply of vaccines.<sup>\*</sup>

On March 3, NACI updated its recommendations to say that the time in between two doses could be extended by a much longer amount of time without compromising on these vaccines' effectiveness.<sup>\*</sup> NACI advocated for the wait time to be extended to up to four months, which was the longest interval recommended by a country at the time.<sup>\*</sup> Although there wasn't any data of people who had waited four months in between vaccines, this length of time was still considered safe and effective due to modelling, or projections based on

existing data.\* This decision was made in the context of Canada having a very limited supply of vaccines.\* NACI said that, with this wait period of 4 months in between doses, 80% of Canadians over the age of 16 could get at least one shot by the end of June.\*

On April 7, NACI said that the mandatory wait time in between shots would be able to be reduced to around 1.5 or 2 months as more the federal government purchases and receives shipments of more vaccines.\*

On May 10, the government expanded their list of who can receive a second dose in a shorter time to include medical workers interacting with COVID-19 patients, COVID-19 testing centre staff and first responders.\* NACI said the interval of up to 16 weeks was “the upper limit” based on a limited supply of vaccines and an effort to widely disperse some degree of protection with first doses.\* However, now we have enough vaccines to start accelerating the timing of people’s second shots.\*

In its latest release on May 28, NACI advised: “With the increase of COVID-19 vaccine supply in Canada, second doses should be offered as soon as possible, with priority given to those at highest risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 disease after or concurrent with first doses for all remaining eligible populations.”\* On the same day, Premier Doug Ford announced that Ontario will be shortening its gap between vaccines.\*

Last Friday, NACI also said that, after reviewing additional evidence, safety information, and real-world data, a full two-dose mRNA vaccine series should be what is offered to people who are immunosuppressed, have an autoimmune condition, are pregnant or are breastfeeding.\* In other words, people in this category should receive two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. Health Canada’s message is unchanged: all vaccines are safe and effective, and everyone should take the first one they can get.\*

To conclude, the recommendations keep changing due to two main reasons. First, new studies on COVID-19 vaccines are being published and reviewed on an ongoing basis. Also, the wait time in between doses was extended due to a scarcity of vaccines at the time, which is no longer a concern as new shipments of vaccines are arriving each week.

---

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:

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