
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2024HLTH0150-001562
Oct. 22, 2024

Office of the Provincial Health Officer
Ministry of Health

Updated vaccines for influenza, COVID-19 available throughout B.C.

VICTORIA – Updated vaccines that protect against the latest influenza strains and COVID-19 variants circulating are available for people in B.C. to help protect families, communities and the health-care system.

Dr. Bonnie Henry, provincial health officer for B.C., again encourages people six months and older to get immunized with the updated influenza and COVID-19 vaccines, and to exercise healthy habits to stay well this fall and winter.

“This is the time of year when we see increases in viral respiratory illnesses in B.C., including influenza and COVID-19, so it is particularly important to remember healthy habits we can all follow to protect ourselves, our loved ones and our communities,” Henry said. “That includes covering your cough, cleaning your hands regularly, staying away from others if you have a cough or a fever, wearing a mask if you have lingering symptoms or need extra protection, and getting the updated influenza and COVID-19 vaccines. By getting immunized for both influenza and COVID-19, we are not only protecting ourselves, but also those around us.”

Invitations for immunizations for priority populations began Oct. 8, 2024. The priority populations include people most at risk of severe illness and complications, such as seniors 65 and older, residents in long-term care facilities, people with chronic health conditions (e.g., cancer, heart disease, diabetes, etc.) and health-care workers. People will receive notifications until early November.

People will be able to receive influenza and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time, if they want.

Vaccines are available in more than 1,300 participating pharmacies, health-authority clinics and some primary-care providers’ offices throughout the province. People can call 1 833 838-2323 if they have questions or need help booking. The vaccines remain free and are available for all B.C. residents six months and older, including enhanced influenza vaccines for seniors.

Health Canada has approved updated mRNA vaccines targeting the KP.2 COVID-19 subvariant. These vaccines are approved for use for people six months and older, and are available as part of B.C.’s fall and winter respiratory illness vaccine program.

Quick Facts:

- Oct. 15, 2024, was a record-breaking day for pharmacies with the highest number of vaccinations in a single day:
 - On that day, B.C. pharmacies administered 81,859 vaccinations (49,425 for influenza and 32,434 for COVID-19).
- For the opening week starting Oct. 15, 2024, 369,774 vaccines were administered,

beating the previous total by 3,594 doses (366,180 last year).

- This represents 141,522 COVID-19 and 228,252 influenza doses in opening week among priority populations.
- These numbers of vaccinations broke the previous record set Oct. 12, 2023:
 - On that day, B.C pharmacies administered 70,739 vaccinations (45,831 for influenza and 24,908 for COVID-19).
- B.C. has ordered 2.2 million doses of the updated COVID-19 vaccines and 2.3 million doses of the new influenza vaccine for the 2024-25 respiratory illness season, including enhanced influenza vaccines for seniors.

Learn More:

About B.C.'s immunization program and how to vaccinated this fall:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/immunizations>

To learn about COVID-19: <https://healthlinkbc.ca/covid19>

To learn about COVID-19 immunization: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/vaccine/register>

To learn about influenza: <https://healthlinkbc.ca/influenza>

To learn more about health information services in B.C.: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/>

A backgrounder follows.

Contact:

Ministry of Health

Communications

250 952-1887 (media line)

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BACKGROUND

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Influenza, COVID-19 vaccinations

People who are already registered in the provincial Get Vaccinated system will automatically receive an invitation to book their influenza and COVID-19 immunization online when they become due.

Those who are not registered yet are encouraged to do so by visiting:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/vaccine/register>

Although booking through the Get Vaccinated system is the most efficient way to access the vaccines, people can also phone the provincial call centre (toll-free) to book or ask questions about their influenza and or COVID-19 immunizations: 1 833 838-2323

Seniors will continue to receive free enhanced influenza vaccines, which offer better protection against influenza than standard-dose vaccines. This is because they stimulate stronger immune responses to compensate for the natural weakening of the immune system that occurs with age. A stronger immune response can lead to better protection against influenza.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommends people get the updated COVID-19 vaccine this fall, or six months since their most recent COVID-19 vaccine dose or infection, whichever is later.

For influenza, public-health officials look to the influenza season in the Southern Hemisphere to help anticipate the influenza season in the Northern Hemisphere. Data from the Southern Hemisphere shows children were more significantly affected this past season. Research and data show the recent viral respiratory illness season varied in severity, timing and duration across regions.

Immunization-related protection against influenza varies from season to season because the influenza viruses continue to change. As a result, circulating influenza viruses may or may not be well matched to the seasonal influenza vaccine produced for use in the Northern Hemisphere.

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