

Expanding the vaccination program: Information for hospital staff and physicians at Hamilton Health Sciences

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Question	Response
<p>What is the HHS policy? Where can I find it?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HHS’ mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy took effect on November 30, 2021. • The HHS policy applies to everyone in the organization including staff, physicians, residents, learners and contractors. The Policy can be found here.
<p>Why is HHS implementing this policy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a leading health science organization, HHS will continue to follow the science showing that vaccines are safe and effective against the spread of COVID-19. • This policy aligns HHS with our regional partners and other Ontario hospitals. • Requiring healthcare workers be vaccinated against certain communicable diseases is evidence-based and protects the public. • There is now conclusive evidence that COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective and safe. A fully vaccinated individual has a more than 80% reduction in the risk of catching COVID-19 and a more than 97% reduction in the risk of serious illness due to COVID-19. • Fully vaccinated individuals have a lower probability of contributing to ongoing transmission of the virus, and if infected, appear to be infectious for a shorter period of time compared to the unvaccinated.
<p>Will there be exceptions to the mandatory vaccine policy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. There will not be any exceptions to the mandatory vaccination policy with the exemption of approved medical and/or religious exemptions as per the Policy. • We will develop an approach that consistently that addresses the various vaccination stages.
<p>What’s the latest discipline process of the policy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff and physicians at HHS must now be fully vaccinated subject to limited exceptions. • Approximately 178 terminations have been issued as of January 27, 2022.
<p>What does “fully vaccinated” mean?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully vaccinated means having received the full series of a COVID-19 vaccine or combination of COVID-19 vaccines approved by the World Health Organization (e.g., two doses of a two-dose vaccine series, or one dose of a single-dose vaccine series); and having received the final dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at least 14 days ago
<p>If I have a medical or religious exemption or not fully vaccinated, do I have to undergo regular testing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rapid antigen testing shall be undertaken a minimum of 2 times per week (currently Monday and Thursday), in alignment with provincial guidance, and the Participating Individual shall in the case of each test be prepared to provide verification of a negative test result to EHS, their Primary Employer or educational institution.
<p>What is deemed to be a medical exemption?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are likely to be very few medical exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination. • The largest group of individuals who receive a medical exception will be those with severe allergic reactions to a previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine or to any of its components until they have been assessed by an allergist/immunologist to review methods for possible (re)administration of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Is pregnancy deemed an exemption?

Will I still be required to complete the self-screening prior to coming to an HHS site if I show proof of vaccination?

- Medical exemptions will be required to be submitted and approved by Employee Health Services. Click [here](#) to access the form that will need to be completed by your primary care provider.
- No. It is highly recommended to get vaccinated as pregnant women are at higher risk of complications if infected.
- Yes, before attending an HHS site each day, staff, physicians, residents, learners and approved contractors are required to complete the COVID-19 self-screening tool.

How safe are the vaccines?

- There is now conclusive evidence that COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective and safe. A fully vaccinated individual has a more than 80% reduction in the risk of catching COVID-19 and a more than 97% reduction in the risk of serious illness due to COVID-19
- Fully vaccinated individuals have a lower probability of contributing to ongoing transmission of the virus, and if infected, appear to be infectious for a shorter period of time compared to the unvaccinated
- Only vaccines that Health Canada determines to be safe and effective will be approved for use in Canada and Ontario
- Primary care providers and patients can be confident standards of safety, efficacy, and quality have not been compromised to expedite the approval of COVID-19 vaccines
- Health Canada’s oversight of COVID-19 vaccines will NOT stop at approval
- Health Canada will monitor the vaccine’s safety and effectiveness now and into the future
- Research into the value of mRNA for vaccinations has been progressing for over ten years
- Though the new vaccine is the first mRNA vaccine approved for use in humans, mRNA has been successfully used in cancer treatments
- Read more about [vaccine approval process and safety](#).
- Find out more in this [resources page](#) for clinicians

If I am allergic to something or I have other health issues, can I still get the vaccine?

- Anyone uncertain about whether or not they should get the vaccine because of health concerns should contact their primary care physician.
- For more information, please read the Province’s recommendations for [Special Populations](#).

What about side effects?

- Like all vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccine can cause side effects.
- Very common side effects (may affect more than 1 in 10 people):
 - Pain at injection site
 - Fatigue
 - Headache
 - Muscle pain
 - Chills
 - Joint pain
 - Fever
- Uncommon side effects (may affect up to 1 in 100 people)
 - Enlarged lymph nodes
- [Find out more about possible side effects](#).

Should pregnant staff get vaccinated? What about if they are breastfeeding?

- **The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologist of Canada (SOGC) supports the use of all available COVID-19 vaccines approved in Canada in any trimester of pregnancy and during breastfeeding.**
- The four COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada have been demonstrated to be safe and highly effective for preventing serious disease from COVID-19.
- Surveillance has been ongoing on a global scale and has not detected adverse

pregnancy outcomes related to any COVID-19 vaccinations and emerging evidence shows passive antibody transfer to infants.

- Given that pregnancy is a demonstrable risk factor for severe COVID-19 disease, and that emerging reports from major Canadian centres have identified an increased burden of disease affecting pregnant individuals, **the SOGC recommends that all pregnant people should be eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.**
- [More information from the SOGC.](#)

What happens if I develop side effects after I've received the vaccine? Will I have to self-isolate?

- **You cannot get COVID from the vaccine.**
- Staff or physicians who develop symptoms, such as low-grade fever, fatigue/myalgias or headache, within 48 hours after receiving the vaccine must contact EHS for further advice.
- While these non-specific symptoms are expected after vaccination, EHS can advise whether testing to rule out COVID-19 infection is recommended. However, without other symptoms or high-risk contact staff would not generally be required to isolate.
- More [post-vaccine information](#) for healthcare workers.

Where can I find more about the vaccine, its safety, side effects and information about how the province is proceeding?

Here are some key links to important information:

Information is made available by the [provincial government](#). It includes:

- [Vaccine information sheet](#)
- [What you need to know before your vaccine appointment](#)
- [After-care sheet](#)
- [Consent form](#)
- [Vaccine approval and safety](#)
- [General information about vaccines](#)
- Ontario's [vaccination implementation](#)
- Ontario's [ethical framework](#) for vaccinations
- The Province's recommendations for [Special Populations](#).

Should I get the vaccine if I have already had COVID-19?

- There is no evidence of potential harm of vaccination in someone who has a history of COVID-19 infection.
- There is potential for benefit of longer lasting immunity after vaccine mediated immunity.
- We are advising staff with a known history of COVID-19 to proceed to vaccination. It is encouraged that staff consult with their primary care physician for issues or questions they may have related to them specifically.

If I am fully vaccinated, with both doses received, why do I still need to wear PPE and abide by physical distancing rules?

- For now, vaccination status is not changing PPE requirements, neither in healthcare nor in the community. PPE protects the vaccinated individual wearing it, but also the not-yet vaccinated individuals and those whose response to vaccination may be suboptimal, in particular in the current situation while wave 4 is ramping up.
- If a person (vaccinated or not) is exposed to COVID-19 at work and not adhering to PPE practices they may be deemed medium or high risk exposure requiring them to be off work or put in work isolation after discussion with Employee Health Services.

Who is eligible for a booster dose?

- Following [the provincial announcement on December 15](#) all Ontarians aged 18+ who received their **second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at least 3 months (84 days) ago are eligible for a booster**
- The Province's announcement on expanded eligibility for third and booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine follows the [guidance document](#) on third doses issued by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)

<p>Do I have to get a booster dose?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is strongly recommended that all HHS staff and physicians receive the booster of the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they are eligible • There is a significant possibility that a booster dose will become a future requirement to continue to meet the definition of “Fully Vaccinated” in Ontario and for the purposes of the HHS COVID-19 Vaccination Management Policy.
<p>Where and how do I book a booster dose?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible individuals may also attend a clinic in the community by booking via the Province’s website
<p>Do I get paid to go to my appointment if I am scheduled to work during that time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, you will not be paid to go get your booster dose
<p>Do I need to submit proof of a booster dose to be in compliance with HHS’ vaccination policy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While you are not required to submit proof of a COVID-19 booster to be in compliance with the HHS Vaccination Management Policy, you are strongly encouraged to share this information with HHS Employee Health Services for inclusion in your employee health file. You can upload this documentation using the existing EHS tool
<p>Will I receive a receipt as proof of booster dose administration?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • You are also able to get proof of booster dose administration here
<p>Is it safe to get a booster dose?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) released a guidance document that outlines the rationale and safety of the booster dose for eligible populations. An additional summary from NACI about the decision can be found here