

**MEMORANDUM TO:** Health Care Providers

**FROM:** Dr. David Williams  
Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Office of Chief Medical Officer of Health, Public Health  
Ministry of Health

Dr. Homer Tien  
Chair, COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force  
COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Secretariat  
Ministry of the Solicitor General

**DATE:** June 14, 2021

**SUBJECT:** **Accelerated Second Doses in Response to the Delta Variant Virus Risk**

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This memo is to inform you of two important updates to Ontario's COVID-19 vaccination program to accelerate second doses for Ontarians to enhance individual protection in response to the risk posed by the COVID-19 Delta (B.1.617) variant.

**1) Acceleration of Second Doses in Delta Hot Spots**

On Monday, June 14th, the province will be accelerating eligibility to book second doses for individuals living in areas with an increased prevalence of the Delta variant virus and who received their first dose up to and including May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

- Areas of increased prevalence include the following public health units: Halton, Peel, Porcupine, Toronto, Waterloo, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph and York.
- Individuals in this group can schedule their second dose appointments at an interval of no less than 28 days through the provincial booking system, directly through public health units that use their own booking system, and through pharmacies and primary care providers participating in the rollout.

This change is being made now to ensure that these regions have earlier access to the added protection provided by a second dose of vaccine.

**2) Acceleration of Second Doses of AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine**

In addition, beginning Monday, June 14, 2021, the province will change the second dose interval for individuals who have already received their first dose of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine to an interval of at least 8 weeks. Those who received a first dose of AstraZeneca will have the option to receive a second dose of either AstraZeneca or an mRNA vaccine. This decision is based on emerging clinical evidence on the use of mixed COVID-19 immunization schedules as supported by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI).

- Evidence from multiple studies indicates that the mixing of COVID-19 vaccines (i.e. receiving an mRNA vaccine after an AstraZeneca vaccine) at dosing intervals between 8 and 12 weeks is safe and demonstrates a beneficial immune response.
- There is also evidence that a longer interval between two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine (e.g. a 12-week interval) provides higher level protection compared with shorter intervals.

While we continue to learn about the Delta variant virus, early real-world evidence points to a diminished level of protection with only one dose of vaccine. A complete vaccine series (two doses) provides good protection against the Delta variant. All vaccines provided as part of Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine program demonstrate strong vaccine effectiveness at one dose to the other known variants as well as to the wild type SARS-CoV-2 -virus. More [information](#) about vaccine effectiveness in Ontario can be found on Public Health Ontario's website.

With the welcome news of additional Moderna vaccine over the next two weeks, we can reach an ever-wider group of Ontarians for both first and second doses. With the information from NACI about the safety and efficacy of heterogenous vaccine series (i.e. using different mRNA products within a series or using an mRNA product as a second dose for patients who received the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine as their first dose) we must work to get all available vaccine to patients as quickly as possible. Your role in explaining options related to a homogeneous and mixed vaccine series to your patient groups is very important, including the need for rapid immunization and the risks of waiting for the availability of a specific vaccine product.

An updated version of the COVID-19 Vaccine Series Second Dose Eligibility Quick Reference will be available shortly on the ministry's website for your reference, as well as Qs and As to support you in talking with your patients about these changes. For patients who received a first dose of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, the ministry has revised the *COVID-19 Vaccine Information for Individuals who received a first dose of an AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD COVID-19 vaccine* document which must be reviewed and recorded into COVAX<sub>ON</sub> prior to receiving a second dose of AstraZeneca or an mRNA vaccine.

We will continue to closely monitor COVID-19 activity across the province and adjust our vaccination program in response, to maximize the impact of every dose. Thank you for your support in rebooking appointments and your continued effort to ensure the success of the vaccine rollout program.

Sincerely,

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Chief Medical Office of Health  
Ministry of Health

Dr. Homer Tien  
Chair, COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force  
Ministry of the Solicitor General

cc. Helen Angus, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health

Mario DiTommaso, Deputy Minister, Ministry of the Solicitor General

Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery, Ministry of Health

Dr. Dirk Huyer, Chief Coroner, Office of the Chief Coroner, Ministry of the Solicitor General

Patrick Dicerni, Assistant Deputy Minister, Drugs and Devices Division, Ministry of Health

Dr. Jessica Hopkins, Deputy Chief, Health Protection, Medical and System Support, Public Health Ontario