

**Date:** May 16, 2021

**Memorandum To:** Public Health Units

**From:** Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery

Dr. Dirk Huyer, COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force

**Subject:** **High-Risk Health Care Workers Second Dose Intervals**

---

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, Ontario added high-risk health care workers (HCW) to the list of those eligible to receive their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine earlier than the extended four-month interval. The purpose of this memo is to provide operational guidance to PHUs regarding the provision of second doses in a shortened interval to this specific population.

Eligible HCWs (Highest Priority HCW group in the Phase 1 COVID-19: Guidance for Prioritizing Health Care Workers for COVID-19 Vaccination), long-term care home (LTCH) and retirement home (RH)/Elder Care Lodge staff, and essential caregivers (ECGs) are eligible to book a second dose appointment at a shortened interval with minimum interval defined by the product monograph, as early as May 14<sup>th</sup>. Timing of appointments will vary depending on vaccine supply, appointment availability, and local PHU priorities.

**Considerations:**

There are a number of operational considerations for PHU and hospital partners as they administer second doses in a shortened interval:

- Sequencing of high-risk HCWs by date of receipt of first dose
- Consideration of where and how high-risk HCWs received first dose
- Identification of high-risk HCWs using local systems or through self-attestation
- Balancing first dose strategy and committed allocations vs. provision of second doses (no first doses should be cancelled to provide second doses)
- Timing of available appointments relative to when second doses were previously due
- Opportunities to increase overall uptake and enhance vaccine confidence

At this time, the provincial booking system and call centre are unable to book appointments at the shortened dose interval. There is ongoing work to facilitate single dose booking, however this functionality is not yet available. PHUs/hospitals are encouraged to consider all available vaccine administration options when identifying appropriate strategies to deliver second doses to high-risk HCWs at the shortened interval, taking into consideration local systems, and leveraging the channels that were used initially for first doses if appropriate, to provide as much flexibility as possible. These include, but are not limited to:

- Working with employers and community partners to identify and communicate options available to their staff for receiving a shortened second dose

- Mobile clinics (which can also be used to support increased dose one uptake)
- Additional/dedicated capacity in select mass immunization and hospital clinics
- Targeted pop-up clinics
- Pharmacies
- Primary Care

In addition, Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA) and Ministry of Long-Term Care, (MLTC) in partnership with PHUs and the Ministry of Health (MOH), are working with LTCHs and RHs to identify strategies to further increase access to vaccination for both first and second doses for LTCH and RH staff. This includes working with LTCHs to build capacity and confidence through training and support. This will result in a more independent administration of doses for residents, staff and essential caregivers.

In planning for second doses, please ensure that first dose commitments are honoured, and that you continue with a first dose strategy with the goal of reaching the provincial target of administering first doses to 65% of Ontarians aged 18 and older by the end of May. The province is continuing to monitor both supply and eligibility to determine if and when other populations may become eligible for a shortened second dose.

Thank you for your ongoing hard work to get needles into arms. We recognize that there are many competing priorities across populations, and that balancing these continues to be an ongoing challenge. We look forward to continuing to accelerate COVID-19 vaccine administration and working with all partners to ensure that Ontarians are protected against COVID-19.

Sincerely,

***Original signed by***

Alison Blair  
Associate Deputy Minister  
Pandemic Response and Recovery

***Original signed by***

Dirk Huyer, MD  
Clinical Guidance & Surveillance Workstream  
COVID 19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force

cc:

Hospital CEOs  
Erin Hannah, Associate Deputy Minister, LTC Pandemic Response  
Jeff Butler, Assistant Deputy Minister, LTC Pandemic Response  
Jacqueline Cureton, Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy Programs and Strategic Partnerships  
Matt Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health