

Key Messages to Support Obtaining Consent for Fourth Doses in LTC

December 31, 2021

The need for a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine

- As you may be aware, a new strain of COVID-19 called the Omicron variant is rapidly spreading in Ontario and in many other parts of the world. We are learning about it very quickly and learning more and more about how vaccines might protect against this new form of COVID-19.
- We know that a third dose of vaccine results in higher protection against Omicron infection than in people who have only received two doses. We also know that for all strains of COVID-19, the amount of vaccine protection provided against infection slowly decreases over time.
- Given the changes in the immune response that occur with age, and the fact that third doses were offered 3-4 months ago to boost protection, there is a possibility that protection has decreased again and that a fourth dose of vaccine will help increase levels of immune protection once again.
- The Ontario Immunization Advisory Committee, a group of vaccine experts that provides scientific advice to Public Health Ontario, has recommended that residents in long term care be offered fourth doses. Although Health Canada has not yet authorized fourth doses, the recommendation is made based on expert opinion. Israel has also recently started giving fourth doses of COVID-19 vaccine to all adults over 60 years of age to help protect them against the Omicron strain of COVID-19.

Possible side effects

- Like all vaccines, mRNA COVID-19 vaccines can cause some side effects following vaccination such as fever, body aches, fatigue, sore arm and a general feeling of being unwell.
- These symptoms are relatively common, occurring in the range of 20-60% of young healthy vaccine recipients. However, they are significantly less common in older and frailer adults. These symptoms last a few days, are typically mild.
- Studies have found that these side effects were less common after third doses of vaccine, but we do not yet know how frequently they may occur after a fourth dose.

Obtaining consent

- You can agree to a fourth dose now and change your mind at any time before the vaccination clinic. You can also decide against a fourth dose now and change your mind later.
- This decision is completely voluntary. You can choose to agree or not to. Your decision will not affect your care at the home in any way.