What you need to know about Paxlovid

What is Paxlovid?

Paxlovid is a medication to help prevent you from getting sick from COVID-19.

It contains two medications (nirmatrelvir and ritonavir) that work together to stop the COVID-19 virus from spreading inside your body.

Paxlovid may prevent your symptoms from getting worse and may lower the chance that you will need to go to the hospital for COVID-19.

Paxlovid will not prevent you from getting infected with COVID-19 again.

Paxlovid is not a substitute for vaccination. The best defence against serious COVID-19 infection is to stay up to date with vaccinations.

Who should get Paxlovid?

You can get Paxlovid if you are at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19. You must start Paxlovid within five days of the start of symptoms for it to work well.

Your risk of serious illness is based on your health, age and vaccination status.

A health care provider can tell you if you are at high risk. You can also use Ontario's screener tool to see if you might be at high risk: **https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-treatment-screener**

You might be at higher risk if you are:

✓ 60 or older;

✓ 18 or older and immunocompromised (have an immune system that is weakened by a health condition or medications);

✓ 18 to 59 years old and may not have enough immunity against COVID-19 (for example, you are unvaccinated, or it has been more than six months since you had a vaccine dose or got sick with COVID-19)

✓ 18 to 59 years old with one or more medical conditions that put you at higher risk of severe COVID-19. Some medical conditions that may put you at higher risk of severe COVID-19 are:

- cancer
- cerebrovascular disease (e.g., stroke)
- kidney disease
- liver disease
- lung disease
- cystic fibrosis
- diabetes
- disabilities
- heart conditions
- HIV infection
- certain mental health disorders
- obesity
- pregnancy and recent pregnancy
- smoking (current or former)
- tuberculosis

Talk to a health care provider to discuss options if you think you are at high risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

I think I have COVID-19. How do I get Paxlovid?

You can check your symptoms here: **covid-19.ontario.ca/exposed#symptoms**

If you think you're at high risk of serious illness and have symptoms of COVID-19, you can:

- contact your pharmacy (many pharmacists can prescribe Paxlovid)
- contact your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner)

You can also contact Health811 if you have questions or need help. Call 811 or visit **ontario.ca/health811** to chat with a nurse online.

Ontario Health

Health811 may connect you to a virtual care consultation if this is right for you.

It is important that you talk to a health care provider as soon as you start having symptoms. Paxlovid must be started within five days of the start of symptoms for it to work well.

If you have severe symptoms, call 911 or go to the emergency department. Severe symptoms include:

- trouble breathing
- chest pain
- loss of consciousness
- confusion

What information do I need to bring when I talk to my health care provider about Paxlovid?

When you talk to a health care provider, you should bring:

- a list of all the medications you are taking, including prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- a list of your medical conditions
- a copy of any recent bloodwork, if you have it available

Tell your health care provider if you have any allergies, liver or kidney disease, or if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or using hormonal birth control (such as birth control pills or patches).

Do I need to get a COVID-19 test to get Paxlovid?

You will need a positive COVID-19 test to get Paxlovid. This can be a PCR, rapid molecular test, or rapid antigen test (even if it was done at home).

You do not need to have a positive test before talking to a health care provider about Paxlovid. They will help you get a test if you need one.

Is Paxlovid free?

Paxlovid is free with a prescription from a health care provider. You do not need an OHIP card to get Paxlovid.

How do I take Paxlovid?

Paxlovid is taken orally (by mouth) twice a day for five days.

Paxlovid comes in a package with a morning dose and an evening dose. Each dose includes 2 tablets of nirmatrelvir (pink tablets) and 1 tablet of ritonavir (white tablet).

People with kidney disease may have a lower dose prescribed.

You must take all three morning tablets at the same time and all three evening tablets at the same time, for the full 5 days. Paxlovid can be taken with or without food.

If you miss a dose of Paxlovid and it is within 8 hours of the time it is usually taken, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss a dose by more than 8 hours, skip the missed dose and take the next dose at your regular time. Do not take 2 doses of Paxlovid (6 tablets) at the same time.

Always take Paxlovid exactly as your health care provider has told you to.

You are still contagious while taking Paxlovid treatment and should follow public health measures to avoid spreading the infection. Read about current public health measures here: https://www.ontario.ca/page/public-health-measures-and-advice

What are the possible side effects of Paxlovid?

You might experience the following side effects while taking Paxlovid:

- taste changes
- diarrhea
- high blood pressure
- muscle aches
- abdominal pain
- nausea
- feeling generally unwell

You may notice other side effects. Speak to your health care provider if you have side effects that are bothering you or do not go away.

Other rare but possible side effects of Paxlovid are:

- **Allergic reactions.** Stop taking Paxlovid and call your health care provider right away if you get any of the following symptoms of an allergic reaction: itchy spots on your skin (hives), trouble swallowing or breathing, swollen lips, face, or tongue, throat tightness or hoarseness.

- **Liver problems.** Tell your health care provider right away if you have any of these signs and symptoms of liver problems: yellowish skin or eyes (jaundice), unusually dark-colored urine (pee), new pain on the right side of your belly.

- **Resistance to HIV medicines.** If you have untreated HIV infection, Paxlovid may lead to some HIV medicines not working as well in the future.

Can I take Paxlovid while taking other medications?

Paxlovid can interact with many commonly used medications and supplements. A health care provider (for example, a pharmacist) might make changes to your other medications so that you can safely take Paxlovid.

Paxlovid might also affect how hormonal birth control works. You should use another method of contraception (for example, condoms or abstinence) while taking Paxlovid.

What should I do if my COVID-19 symptoms get worse?

Talk to your health care provider if you do not feel better or if you feel worse after 5 days.

If you develop severe symptoms, call 911 or go to the emergency department. Severe symptoms include:

- trouble breathing
- chest pain
- loss of consciousness
- confusion