

Questions and Answers: Nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid™)

What is Paxlovid?

PAXLOVID (nirmatrelvir/ritonavir) is the first at-home prescription medication approved for use by Health Canada for COVID-19.

How does Paxlovid work?

PAXLOVID contains two medicines that work together, called nirmatrelvir and ritonavir. Nirmatrelvir is an antiviral medicine, which means it can help your body fight the virus infection. It may stop the virus from multiplying in your body. Ritonavir helps to boost the effect of nirmatrelvir.

What is Paxlovid used for?

Health Canada has authorized the use of Paxlovid to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 infection that has been confirmed by testing. Paxlovid is used to prevent these symptoms from getting worse in people who have a high risk of needing to go to the hospital for COVID-19.

What if I've only received a positive test result from a rapid/at-home test?

Both types of tests are accepted. You can access treatment with a positive test result from either a PCR test or a rapid antigen/at home test.

Who can Paxlovid help?

PAXLOVID can be used to treat **adults 18 years and older who are at higher risk of severe illness** and who may need to go to the hospital for COVID-19.

This includes people who are:

- Immunocompromised
 - Clinically extremely vulnerable
 - Patients who have TWO of the following:
 - Are 70 years or older (60 years if they are Indigenous)
 - Are unvaccinated or do not have COVID-19 immunizations that are up-to-date
 - Have at least one serious chronic medical condition
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- Chronic medical conditions can include things like: diabetes, chronic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), chronic kidney disease and chronic cancers.
 - PAXLOVID is not helpful for people who are already in the hospital and experiencing severe symptoms such as requiring oxygen support for breathing.
 - PAXLOVID does not prevent people from getting COVID-19 before or after an exposure.
 - Vaccination is still recommended to reduce the risk of serious outcomes from COVID-19.

What are the precautions?

- There are many medicines and some herbals supplements that cannot be taken with PAXLOVID. A doctor or pharmacist will review your medications before prescribing PAXLOVID.
- **Ensure your care provider has an up to date and complete list of all medicines you are taking.** Let them know before taking any new medications while taking PAXLOVID.
- You shouldn't take PAXLOVID if you are allergic to any of the ingredients in PAXLOVID.
- Discuss with your care provider if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or using contraception.

How to request and get treatment

The first step is to complete a [self-assessment questionnaire](#).

If you need help to complete the self-assessment, call Service BC: [1-888-COVID-19](tel:1-888-COVID-19) (7:30 am to 8 pm).

- You should start the process as soon as possible. Delays may mean you are not able to receive Paxlovid because treatment must be started within 5 days of developing symptoms.
- Paxlovid treatment is not suitable for everyone and must be prescribed by a health care provider.

Option 1: Talk to your family doctor, nurse practitioner or specialist

If you have a family doctor, nurse practitioner or specialist, contact them as soon as possible to talk about treatment options.

- If you can't get an appointment within 3 days of symptoms starting, you should request treatment via Service BC instead.

Option 2: Request treatment through Service BC

The request process has 4 steps. You must complete each step.

- Details can be found at: gov.bc.ca/covidtreatments or by calling 1-888-268-4319.

Is there a charge for my Paxlovid prescription?

There is no charge for Paxlovid for any resident of B.C. with active MSP coverage and a prescription. This also applies to out-of-province Canadian's who meet criteria.

Are all pharmacies stocking Paxlovid? How can I pick up my prescription for Paxlovid?

A number of community pharmacies across B.C. are now stocking Paxlovid. When you receive your prescription for Paxlovid, your health-care provider will provide you with instructions on how to receive your treatment supply. Home delivery or pick-up at a local pharmacy are a couple of the possible options.

How is Paxlovid taken?

- PAXLOVID needs to be **taken within 5 days** since the start of COVID-19 symptoms. It comes pre-packaged with tablets for a morning dose and an evening dose:
 - **Each dose = 2 tablets of nirmatrelvir 150mg (pink tablets) and 1 tablet of ritonavir 100mg (white tablet) = total of 3 tablets.**

- People with chronic kidney disease may have a different dose prescribed (1 tablet of nirmatrelvir and 1 tablet of ritonavir = 2 tablets).
- You must take all the morning tablets at the same time and all the evening tablets at the same time, for the full 5 days.
- Always take PAXLOVID exactly as your care provider has told you to.
- If you miss taking your dose and it is **within 8 hours** of the time it is usually taken, take it as soon as you remember. If it has been **more than 8 hours**, skip the missed dose and take the next dose at your regular time. Do not take 2 doses of PAXLOVID at the same time.

Will there be follow-up or monitoring?

You may receive a phone call from the community pharmacist 6 to 10 days after you received your medication. They will ask you a few questions about how you are feeling and if you had any side-effects from the medications.

What are the possible side effects?

- Some people may experience diarrhea, a bad taste in the mouth, nausea, vomiting, headache, muscle aches, or increased blood pressure.
- If you have a symptom or side effect that becomes bad enough to interfere with your daily activities, tell your care provider or call 8-1-1 and tell them you are taking this medication.
- Tell your care provider right away or call 9-1-1 if you get any symptoms of an allergic reaction such as difficulty breathing, chest tightness, fall or increase in blood pressure, swelling of your face, throat irritation, rash with hives, itching or an itchy rash.
- It is possible that there may be some unknown side effects. Health Canada is continuing to monitor this new treatment.

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

- If you have difficulty breathing, have chest pain, can't drink, feel very sick, feel confused, or experience any loss of consciousness, **go to an urgent care clinic, emergency department, or call 9-1-1.**
- For questions about COVID-19 symptoms, call 8-1-1 or your care provider or an urgent care centre.

This treatment does not change how long you need to isolate. It is important you continue to follow the guidance given to you at the time of your positive test.

For more information, visit [BCCDC](https://bccdc.ca/covid19treatments) at bccdc.ca/covid19treatments