**Top-line messages**

From 1 March, a new Pfizer COVID-19 bivalent vaccine will be available to eligible New Zealanders as a booster dose.

* This will replace the existing Pfizer booster and is considered likely to be more effective against Omicron subvariants than earlier vaccines.
* 1.9 million New Zealanders are currently eligible for a first or second booster and will be able to get the bivalent vaccine from 1 March. They will get a significant pre-winter boost to their protection from severe illness, hospitalisation and death from COVID-19.
* We encourage them to take this opportunity in March by visiting [www.BookMyVaccine.nz](https://two-nationalimmunisationprogramme.cmail19.com/t/i-i-qhubil-l-r/) or calling the COVID Vaccination Healthline on 0800 28 29 26 (8am to 8pm, 7 days a week).

From 1 April, an additional booster dose will be made available to:

* anyone aged 30 and over who has completed a primary course, as long as it’s been at least 6 months since their last COVID-19 booster or positive COVID-19 test.
* anyone [at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19](https://two-nationalimmunisationprogramme.cmail19.com/t/i-i-qhubil-l-y/) who has completed a primary course, as long as it’s been at least 6 months since their last COVID-19 booster or positive COVID-19 test. These high-risk groups include:

-  people aged 65 years and over

- Māori and Pacific peoples aged 50 years and over

- residents of aged care and disability care facilities

- severely immunocompromised people

- people aged 16 years and over who have a medical condition that increases the risk of severe breakthrough COVID-19 illness

- people aged 16 years and over who live with disability with significant or complex health needs or multiple comorbidities.

- health, aged care, and disability workers aged 30 years and over.

1 April is also the start of flu vaccination for 2023. We encourage everyone who is eligible to get their COVID-19 booster and flu vaccination to ensure that they are protected ahead of winter.

Staying up to date with the recommended COVID-19 vaccinations will continue to protect you from the risk of serious illness, hospitalisation, or death from COVID-19.  This is particularly important as we approach the winter season.

**Supporting messages**

* The BA.4/5 bivalent vaccine will replace the existing Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for boosters. It will not replace the vaccines used for the primary vaccination course, which will continue to be the original Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine or the Novavax vaccine.
* The BA.4/5 bivalent vaccine causes the immune system to create antibodies against both the original variant of SARS-CoV-2 and Omicron subvariants and is therefore likely to provide better protection.
* The additional booster dose can only be administered to eligible people whose most recent COVID-19 vaccine or positive COVID-19 test was at least 6 months ago, irrespective of how many prior doses that person has received.

The Ministry of Health will continue to review new information on COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines and will make further recommendations if necessary.