

March 15, 2021

COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

1. When can I get the vaccine?

Distribution is being directed by provincial governments, so access varies from province to province and place to place. In general, though, the vaccine is being made available to different groups of people at different times. The provinces are looking at each of the priority groups and communicating their plans on their government websites and through health authorities.

In some places, March of Dimes Canada clients and staff have begun to be vaccinated – particularly in supportive housing and congregate settings where outbreaks have occurred. As well, because many of our frontline staff fall in line with the high priority healthcare worker definition, delivering daily chronic homecare, even some outreach staff have qualified and staff not related to outbreaks.

The issue for us right now is that the way public health authorities are defining high risk/priority is a bit confusing.

We're working with our health units, hospital partners and government funders to make sure they understand the services we deliver and how vulnerable our consumers and the staff supporting them are. Our goal is to get our consumers and frontline workers vaccinated as soon as possible in every region where we work.

We are also working to ensure vaccination clinics are fully accessible.

2. Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Getting vaccinated is the single most effective thing you can do to protect yourself now and get us all back to normal in the future.

Once enough people get vaccinated (probably when over 70 per cent of the population have been vaccinated), we won't have to take such rigid protective measures anymore.

Just having that number of people vaccinated will protect everyone – even those who can't get vaccinated, like those under 16 years of age, and those who are



not able to get the vaccine because of medical reasons (e.g., their immune system is weak because of something like cancer treatment).

3. Why are they saying we have to continue to wear masks and physically distance after being vaccinated?

In the short term, there will still be a small chance of getting COVID-19, even after being vaccinated because the vaccines aren't perfect and they don't reach their full effectiveness for a period of time after the vaccination (usually a week or two after the second shot, depending on which vaccine you receive). We will all have to continue to wear masks, physically distance, and – if you are providing in-person care – follow all the infection prevention and control recommendations, including wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). We will have to do that until enough people in the population have been vaccinated and protected, that we can go back to normal.

4. What is herd immunity?

Herd immunity – also called community immunity – happens when most of the population has been vaccinated. It makes it possible to protect the population from a disease, including those who can't be vaccinated, such as newborns or people with weak immune systems.

Herd immunity is what we have to reach to be able to go back to normal life.

We don't know how long it will take. Some people are saying we might be there by the end of the summer. We'll see.

5. There are now several vaccines available in Canada. How do I choose?

You will probably not be given a choice. All of the vaccines are approved as safe and effective by Health Canada. Our advice is to accept whichever vaccine is offered to you, as soon as it is offered.

Health experts are saying to take whatever is offered because it decreases your likelihood of severe disease and death.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has released a statement saying: “the best vaccine for a Canadian is the one they can get.”

All of the vaccines are effective enough to get us to a level of herd or community immunity to protect the people who for a legitimate reason (people like babies or cancer patients who have weak immune systems) cannot be vaccinated – and to allow us all to return to normal.



Fact Sheet

To learn about the Pfizer vaccine, look here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/pfizer-biontech.html>

To learn about the Moderna vaccine, look here:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/moderna.html>

To learn about the AstraZeneca vaccine, look here:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/astrazeneca.html>

To learn about the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine, look here:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/janssen.html>

6. Are they sure the vaccines are safe when they were created so quickly?

There are a lot of good reasons the vaccine developers were able to work so quickly.

Vaccines used to take 4-6 years, or longer, to develop and were tested on 3,000 to 6,000 people over several years. But with so many people dying of COVID-19, scientists had to change their development process, because we couldn't wait that long. Fortunately, that was possible with new technology that's much faster, more accurate and targeted.

They've also been able to test the vaccines on **way more people** than they could in the past.

- Almost 44,000 people participated in the Pfizer Phase 3 trial – that's the final phase of a clinical trial.
- More than 30,000 people participated in the Moderna Phase 3 trial.
- Over 23,000 people participated in the AstraZeneca trials.
- Over 40,000 people participated in the Janssen trials.

Those are huge numbers compared to the old days, when they'd test vaccines on 6,000 people.

There's also the fact that the pandemic was out of control last summer and fall when the clinical trials were going on. That meant that people in the clinical trials were very likely to have been exposed to the virus, so researchers could see



within months how many volunteers who were vaccinated got COVID compared to volunteers who got the placebos.

Remember, too, that the virus has affected the whole world, so scientists, health professionals, researchers, industry and governments from around the globe are working together 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in a way we've never seen before. This also means that there's been an enormous amount of funding directed specifically towards COVID-19 vaccine research.

Finally, Health Canada made COVID-19 vaccines a priority so that reviews could be fast-tracked. That's allowed it to review the vaccines quickly and conclude that they're safe and effective. Several more vaccines are under review right now.

7. Can the vaccines give me COVID-19?

No. No vaccine approved for use in Canada has the COVID-19 virus in it, so you cannot get COVID from the vaccine.

But, you can get a mild case of COVID **in spite of** having the vaccine, because the vaccines are not 100 per cent effective and take a week or two after you've received the full dose to be fully effective.

With any vaccine, you could develop side effects such as a sore arm, muscle pain or a fever, but that is mild and lasts only a few days – and does not put you at risk of severe illness or death.

8. What are the side effects?

Side effects are the result of your immune system building protection. Common side effects include:

- Pain at the injection site
- Headache
- Feeling tired
- Muscle or joint pain
- Fever or chills.

You might feel like you have a mild flu, but it will clear up in a few days.

Some people are saying they had almost no side effects with their first dose, but stronger side effects with the second dose. That is considered normal.

9. What about an allergic reaction?

A small percentage of people are allergic to some of the ingredients used in vaccines, so please check this out carefully if you've had an allergic reaction to any other vaccine in the past. A list of ingredients is available on the governments' websites – be sure to talk to your doctor if you are or may be allergic to any of them.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction include hives (bumps on the skin that are often very itchy), swelling of your face, tongue or throat, or difficulty breathing. Most serious reactions will occur shortly after injection, and clinic staff are prepared to manage an allergic reaction should it occur. If you are concerned about any reactions you experience after receiving the vaccine, contact your health care provider. You can also contact your local public health unit to ask questions or to report an adverse reaction.

Serious reactions after receiving the vaccine are rare. However, should you develop any of the following reactions within three days of receiving the vaccine, seek medical attention right away or call 911:

- Hives
- Swelling of the face or mouth
- Trouble breathing
- Very pale colour and serious drowsiness
- High fever (over 40°C)
- Convulsions or seizures
- Other serious symptoms (e.g., “pins and needles” or numbness)

10. I have certain medical conditions that could affect my decision. What should I do?

You should talk about this with your physician. There are set of questions they go through to check to see if you have any medical reasons that would prevent you from being vaccinated.

11. With variant strains becoming dominant, doesn't that mean the vaccines won't be effective?

The current vaccines are continuing to prevent severe illness and death. Even with the new variants, people who've been vaccinated are not falling severely ill or dying from COVID-19 in large numbers. This may be because the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 doesn't seem to mutate as much or as quickly as the influenza virus that causes the flu. That's good news.

However, scientists and public health experts are saying we might end up requiring booster shots – an additional dose at some point in the future – or a new vaccine designed to combat the new variants. Governments around the world are already working together to examine this. Vaccine manufacturers are already conducting new studies and trials focused on the new variants.

12. I'm worried because the time between the first and second dose is being extended. I don't think they know what they are doing.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are approved by Health Canada for use as a two-dose schedule given either 21 days or 28 days apart. However, studies have been conducted – and are continuing – to look at longer spans of time between the two doses. For instance, B.C.'s public health officials have proposed a delay between the first shot and the second shot to 35 days. Based on data available to the National Advisory Committee on Immunization through Health Canada for both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, there was no difference in vaccine effectiveness between the people who got their second dose at day 19 and the people who got it at day 42.

Extending the interval between the first and second dose is being considered and implemented all around the world in order to allow the widest population to receive the first dose.

13. How can I keep up-to-date on news about vaccines?

There are new developments every day. If you're worried, or have any questions, you should talk with your doctor.

Here are some reliable sources of information from the various governments:

Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/guidance-prioritization-initial-doses-covid-19-vaccines.html>

B.C.: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine/covid-19-vaccination-at-a-glance>

Alberta: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/hp/cdc/if-hp-cdc-ipism-covid-19-vaccine-information-sheet.pdf>

Saskatchewan: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/hp/cdc/if-hp-cdc-ipism-covid-19-vaccine-information-sheet.pdf>

Manitoba: https://manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/covid/covid19_vaccine_factsheet.pdf

Ontario: https://covid-19.ontario.ca/getting-covid-19-vaccine-ontario?gclid=Cj0KCQiAmL-ABhDFARIsAKywVafCVx16XCg9KCIBFi3nbjoGw4UirG6VLttmUptTSjNpJIQtVP8DJFsaAs01EALw_wcB

Quebec: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/progress-of-the-covid-19-vaccination/>

New Brunswick: <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/corporate/promo/covid-19/vaccine.html>

FAQs: <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/corporate/promo/covid-19/vaccine/qa.html>

Nova Scotia: <http://www.nshealth.ca/covid-19-vaccine-information>

PEI: <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/health-and-wellness/covid-19-vaccines-and-immunization-program>

Newfoundland and Labrador: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/vaccine/>

Nunavut: <https://gov.nu.ca/health/information/covid-19-vaccination>

Northwest Territories: <https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/services/covid-19-vaccine>

Yukon: <https://yukon.ca/en/health-and-wellness/covid-19-information/your-health-covid-19/covid-19-vaccine-strategy>