



## COVID-19 Vaccines

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

### What are COVID-19 vaccines?

COVID-19 vaccines protect against infection from the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19. The vaccines cause your body to produce antibodies that will help protect you from getting sick if exposed to the virus. The vaccines are approved by Health Canada.

### Who should get the vaccines?

The COVID-19 vaccine rollout in BC is proceeding, starting with those at the highest risk of hospitalization and serious complications of COVID-19 infection but progressing to all adults sequentially. Information on COVID-19 vaccine eligibility can be found on the BCCDC website: [www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine/eligibility](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine/eligibility)

If you had, or may have had, COVID-19 you should still get the vaccine. This is because you may not be immune to the virus that causes COVID-19 and could get infected and sick again.

### How are the vaccines given?

The vaccines are given by injection as a series of 2 doses. It is important to get both doses of the vaccine for full protection. Speak with your immunization provider about when you should get your second dose.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received. Be sure to bring your immunization record with you when returning for your second dose.

### What should I do after I get the vaccine?

After you get the vaccine, continue to follow public health recommendations, such as:

- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer
- Physical distance
- Wear a mask where required

You should not receive any other vaccines until 14 days after a dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

### What are the benefits of the vaccines?

The vaccines are the best way to protect you against COVID-19, which is a serious and sometimes fatal disease. In clinical trials, those who received a vaccine were 63% to 95% less likely to become sick with COVID-19 and were almost completely protected against severe illness (hospitalization and death). When you get immunized, you help protect others as well, including those who are unable to get the vaccine.

### What are the possible reactions after the vaccines?

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get COVID-19. The vaccines are not live virus vaccines and cannot give you COVID-19. Common reactions to the vaccines may include soreness, redness, swelling and itchiness where the vaccine was given. For some people, these reactions may show up 8 or more days after getting the vaccine. Other reactions may include tiredness, headache, fever, chills, muscle or joint soreness, swollen lymph nodes under the armpit, nausea and vomiting. These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days. If you have concerns about any symptoms you develop after receiving the vaccine, speak with your healthcare provider or call **8-1-1** for advice.

A number of processes are in place in Canada and around the world to monitor the safety of the vaccines as more people get immunized. Rare cases of serious blood clots (about 1 to 10 cases in 1,000,000 vaccinated people) have been reported in Europe within 4 to 16 days of getting the AstraZeneca vaccine, and mainly in adults under 55 years old. The AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccines are not currently recommended for those under 55 years of age in Canada.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®) can be taken for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

For information on Reye Syndrome, see [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye Syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because about 1 in a million people can have a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. Should this reaction occur, your healthcare provider is prepared to treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call **9-1-1** or your local emergency number.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your healthcare provider.

### Who should not get the vaccine?

You should not get the vaccine if you have a serious allergy (anaphylaxis) to:

- Polyethylene glycol (PEG) which is in both the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines. PEG can be found in some cosmetics, skin care products, laxatives, cough syrups, and bowel preparation products for colonoscopy. PEG can be an additive in some processed foods and drinks but no cases of anaphylaxis to PEG in foods and drinks have been reported.
- Polysorbate 80 which is in the AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD vaccines. It is also found in medical preparations (e.g., vitamin oils, tablets and anticancer agents) and cosmetics
- A previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine or to any part of the vaccine

Tell your healthcare provider if you have had anaphylaxis but no cause was found after seeing an allergy specialist, or if you had anaphylaxis before and did not get seen by an allergy specialist.

### Are there additional considerations to getting the vaccine?

Speak with your healthcare provider if you:

- Have an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
- Have an autoimmune condition

- Are pregnant, may be pregnant or are planning to become pregnant
- Are breastfeeding
- Have received a monoclonal antibody or convalescent plasma for treatment or prevention of COVID-19
- Have received a vaccine in the last 14 days
- Have symptoms of COVID-19

If you have a new illness preventing you from your regular activities, you should wait until you have recovered. This will help to distinguish side effects of the vaccine from worsening of your illness.

### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infection of the airways and lungs caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. Symptoms of COVID-19 can include cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, tiredness and loss of smell or taste. While some people with COVID-19 may have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, others can require hospitalization and may die. Serious illness is more common in those who are older and those with certain chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or lung disease. For some people, symptoms of COVID-19 can last for weeks or longer. The long-term effects of COVID-19 on a person's health are unknown.

### How is COVID-19 spread?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, talking and singing. It can also be spread by touching an object or surface with the virus on it and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

For more information on COVID-19 vaccines, visit BCCDC's COVID-19 vaccine page [www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine)



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