



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines

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

What are the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines?

The COVID-19 mRNA 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 protect you from getting sick if exposed to the virus. Health Canada approved the vaccines.

Who should get the vaccines?

The vaccines are being provided to those who are at increased risk of exposure to the virus and those most at risk of serious complications. The vaccines will only be available for certain groups of people at first due to limited supply of the vaccines. As the vaccine supply increases other groups of people will be able to get the vaccine. For information on when a vaccine will be available for you visit the BCCDC's COVID-19 vaccine eligibility page at:

<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 you could get infected again and become sick.

How are the vaccines given?

The vaccine is given by injection as 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 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 28 days have passed after you receive the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

What are the benefits of the vaccines?

The vaccine are the best way to protect you against COVID-19 which is a serious and sometimes fatal disease. In clinical trials, those who received the vaccines were about 95% less likely to become sick with COVID-19. 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 and swelling where the vaccine was given. Other reactions include tiredness, headache, fever, chills, muscle or joint soreness, 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 health care provider or call 8-1-1 for advice.

Serious side effects of the vaccines were not seen in the clinical trials. The people who received the vaccines in the trials continue to be followed for any long term side effects from the vaccines. A number of processes are also in place in Canada to monitor the safety of the vaccines as people get immunized.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol[®]) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil[®]) can be given 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 get 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 health care 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 the local emergency number.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

Who should not get the vaccine?

You should not get the vaccine if you:

- Have a serious allergy (anaphylaxis) to polyethylene glycol (PEG). 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. Tell your health care 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.
- Have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of the COVID-19 vaccine or to any part of the vaccine.

Are there other considerations to getting the vaccine?

Speak with your health care provider if you:

- Have an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
- Have an autoimmune disease
- 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 likely 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 <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine>