COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign FAQ
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What you should know about the COVID-19 vaccines
With Health Canada approval of some COVID-19 vaccines, we know that many people have questions about the vaccines and what this means for them. Here are answers to some of the commonly asked questions to help you make an informed decision about getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

About COVID-19 vaccines

How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?
Vaccines tell your body how to identify a specific protein found in the virus and how to start building antibodies that recognize that protein and know how to fight it if you come in contact with the real virus.

How well does the vaccine work, can I still get COVID-19?
The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are given in two doses using a needle in your upper arm. The same vaccine is used for your first and second dose. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are expected to be 94-95% effective after two doses.

The AstraZeneca vaccine follows the same administration regime and has shown an effectiveness of ~62% in preventing symptomatic COVID-19 disease beginning two weeks after the second dose.

Our vaccine clinics currently only use the Pfizer and Moderna versions of the vaccine, but may come to use AstraZeneca, depending on supply. All three of those vaccines have been approved for safe use by Health Canada.

One of the key points to note is that all of the approved vaccines dramatically reduce the likelihood of severe outcomes from infection (i.e. hospitalization or death), which have been shown to occur across the risk spectrum – from an elderly people with chronic disease to young people in perfect health.

Do I still need to wear a mask after I’ve been vaccinated?
Yes. Studies are still underway to determine the effectiveness of the vaccine in preventing asymptomatic infection and reducing the transmission of COVID-19. For now, and until scientific experts say it's safe to stop, it is important to continue to follow the advice of public health officials, including maintaining a physical distance of two metres from people outside of your household, wearing a mask, practicing proper hand hygiene and limiting non-essential travel.
Because we do not yet know whether vaccinated people can spread the virus, and that some of us cannot protect themselves by getting a shot (e.g. children under 16, those allergic to an ingredient of the available vaccines, some who are immunocompromised, etc.), it is critical that everyone continues to adhere to public health measures.

These acts will help keep you, your loved ones and your community safe.

**How long will the vaccine last? Do I need to get it each year?**
Studies are still underway to determine how long the vaccine will provide immunity. The government will keep the public informed as new data becomes available.

**Does the vaccine contain any microchips or tracking devices?**
There is no vaccine "microchip", and the vaccine will not track people or gather personal information into a database.

The sole purpose and function of this vaccine is to enable the world to defeat COVID-19 and end the pandemic.

**What if I don’t take the second dose of the Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca vaccines?**
It is important to receive both doses. Protection offered by the first dose is lower than what is achieved after the second dose. The second dose helps solidify your bodies’ understanding of how to defend itself against this virus.

**What ingredients are in the vaccines?**
Visit the pages of each manufacturer to find ingredients lists posted.

Health Canada also lists the ingredients of the three vaccines that they have approved. They can be found here:

- [Moderna](#)
- [Pfizer-BioNTech](#)
- [AstraZeneca](#)

**Do the vaccines contain pork? Are they Halal?**
There are no animal products in the Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca vaccines. They are considered Halal. You may go on the manufacturers’ websites to see the ingredient lists for their vaccines.

**COVID-19 vaccine safety**

**Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?**
Yes. Only vaccines that Health Canada has approved and determined are safe and effective will be administered in Ontario.
Health Canada has one of the most rigorous scientific review systems in the world. Health Canada only approves a vaccine if it is safe, it works, it meets manufacturing standards, and the benefits of being vaccinated outweigh the risks.

After careful study, Health Canada has approved the use of Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines.

**What was the approval process for the vaccine?**

Canada’s best independent scientists thoroughly reviewed all the data before approving the vaccines as safe and effective for Canadians. All safety steps were followed in approving these vaccines.

View the Ministry of Health’s [summary of the COVID-19 Vaccine Approval Process and Safety](#) for further information.

**Was development of the vaccine rushed?**

Development of the COVID-19 vaccine was relatively “fast” but was not rushed and all required steps were followed. The urgency and investment of global funding allowed for huge, well-run trials. Since the vaccine was developed in the midst of the pandemic it did not take long to find large numbers of people with the disease to come forward for trials. The trials followed all of the processes and standards in place for the safe production of vaccines.

In many ways, the development of the COVID-19 vaccine simply showed us the extraordinary feats we are capable of when we set our collective will towards a problem.

**Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?**

No, the COVID-19 vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 or any other infectious disease. None of the Health Canada approved vaccines contain the virus itself (SARS-CoV2). The vaccines provide our bodies with instructions (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna), or a similar sample to learn from (AstraZeneca), of the virus' means of attacking your cells. This prepares our immune system to look out for, and defend against, it without ever having to encounter it.

It is important to remember that it typically takes a few weeks for the human body to build immunity after vaccination. That means it is possible for a person to become infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just after vaccination. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to train your body to protect itself properly – your immune system needs time to learn.

Even after you receive the vaccine, please continue to follow the public health measures to keep you, your loved ones and your community safe. Remember that not everyone is able to get a vaccine, even if they would like to – e.g. everyone under the age of 16, people with allergies to vaccine ingredients, some who are severely immunocompromised, etc.

**Will I experience side effects?**

Similar to medications and other vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccines can cause side effects. The most common side effects include soreness at the injection site on your arm, a bit of tiredness, chills and/or a mild headache as the vaccine starts to work. During the clinical trials, the most
frequent side effects were mild and resolved within a few days after vaccination.

These types of side effects are expected and simply indicate the vaccine is working to produce protection.

As with any medicines and vaccines, allergic reactions are rare but can occur after receiving a vaccine. 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. This is why everyone who is vaccinated at our clinics undergoes a 15 minute observation period with health care professionals on-site. 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 side effects 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)

**What are the longer-term side effects of this vaccine?**

Ongoing studies on the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines indicate no serious long-term side effects found to date. People who have received the vaccine in studies continue to be monitored for any longer-term side effects.

For more information on adverse events following immunization (AEFIs) or to report an AEFI visit [Public Health Ontario’s vaccine safety web page](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/).

**Are side effects from the second dose worse than the first dose?**

Side effects are more likely to occur after your second dose of the vaccine. Since side effects are the result of your immune system building protection, once your immune system has been primed with the first dose then there is a much stronger immune response to the second dose (this is a good thing!).

**Has anyone died from getting a COVID-19 vaccine?**

There are no confirmed deaths as a direct result of the COVID-19 vaccine. But without a vaccine over 2.5 million people have died globally from a COVID-19 infection.

**Are Black and Indigenous people getting the same vaccine that doctors and White people get?**

Yes. The type of vaccine administered does not vary based on profession or race. Currently in Ontario, supplies of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are available. Which vaccine one gets depends on the setting (e.g. residents of long-term care homes received Moderna since it is
more portable).

**Will the vaccine alter my DNA? Will mRNA stay in my body?**
Vaccines that use mRNA technology, like the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, do not interact with or do anything to your DNA.

Our bodies break down and get rid of the mRNA soon after it is finished using the instructions. The AstraZeneca vaccine is a “viral vector-based vaccine” which uses a harmless virus, such as an adenovirus, as a delivery system. This “vector” virus is not the virus that causes COVID-19. Adenoviruses are among the viruses that can cause the common cold. There are many different types of adenoviruses, and many have been used as delivery systems for other vector-based vaccines for decades. They are simply a vehicle for delivering what your body needs to build its defenses against the virus that causes COVID-19.

**Should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?**

**Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?**
Vaccines are the only foreseeable way to end the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic will not end until the majority of Canadians are vaccinated. You can protect yourself, your loved ones, and your community by getting vaccinated. While the vaccine will protect each of us individually, the primary goal of a vaccine program is to immunize the majority of the population so that COVID-19 can no longer spread.

**Has this kind of vaccination campaign existed on a relative scale previously?**
Mass immunization is the exact same principle upon which we have defeated many viruses, like Smallpox, which raged across the world and killed hundreds of millions of people (for scale, COVID-19 has killed 2.5 million people at a time in history where the world is considerably more dense and interconnected).

Canada has a proud history of neutralizing other viruses similar to this through vaccination programs, like the Polio virus which crippled countless children (Polio no longer exists in Canada thanks to mass vaccination), and the extremely contagious measles virus (only exists in small numbers among children not given the vaccine).

The memory of the horrific outcomes that diseases like polio and measles wrought on our young ones are the reason we have our children inoculated today. It may be painful to see a child writhe when given a needle of these vaccines, but it certainly beats unnecessarily seeing that child in leg braces to walk or on a ventilator to breathe because they contracted a virus we have a prevention for.

The percentage of people in the community that need to be vaccinated before the spread of the virus slows (and hopefully stops altogether) depends on how infectious the disease is and how effective the vaccine is at preventing spread of the disease. These percentages are not yet known. Health authorities across the world are working with this data in real time.
One thing is for certain, the sooner a majority of Ontarians are vaccinated, the sooner our lives can return to normal.

I’m not considered “high risk”. COVID-19 isn’t that serious. Do I need a vaccine?
2.5 million people have died of COVID-19 in less than a year. This is the most serious public health crisis the world has faced in a generation. COVID-19 does not discriminate, and anyone can become sick from the virus.

Even if a healthy person does not die of a COVID-19 infection, they may have long-term complications that impact their ability to experience normal life, such as shortness of breath, fatigue, headaches, muscle/joint pain, cognitive impairment, cough and loss of taste and/or smell. There are a growing group of people called “long-haulers” that include inexplicably healthy, young individuals who have been impacted in this way. Many continue to experience debilitating symptoms from their infection to this day, months after their initial infection.

Even if you are not high-risk, there are other individuals in your community who may be high-risk and immunocompromised, which means their immune systems are not strong enough to receive a vaccine. When a majority of the community is vaccinated, this protects individuals who are immunocompromised because it reduces the chances that the virus can spread throughout the community and infect those individuals who cannot receive the vaccine.

I think I should wait and see what happens to others?
The sooner a majority of Ontarians are vaccinated, the sooner our lives can return to normal.

We need a majority of Ontarians to be vaccinated to end the pandemic.

Health care organizations are working to distribute the vaccine to every corner of the province. To ensure that everyone who wants to be vaccinated can be vaccinated safely and quickly, it is important that people who have access to the vaccine take the opportunity to be vaccinated the first time it is offered to them.

This will help us to prevent waste because once a shot is prepared for a recipient, it must be used within a window of time or it is rendered useless and must be disposed of.

What about those who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant?
People who are pregnant are able to get the COVID-19 vaccine in Scarborough.

There is no scientific reason to believe that the COVID-19 vaccination will affect current or future fertility.

People who were pregnant were excluded from the Phase 3 trials for the Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. Therefore, there is limited data on the safety of these vaccines during pregnancy.

Pregnant individuals in the authorized age group may choose to receive the vaccine after counselling and informed consent that includes:
  • a review of the risks and benefits of the vaccine
• a review of the potential risks/consequences of a COVID-19 infection in pregnancy
• a review of the risk of acquiring a COVID-19 infection in pregnancy
• an acknowledgment of the insufficiency of evidence for the use of current COVID-19 vaccines in the pregnant population

If after this counselling with their health care provider, the pregnant individual feels the potential benefits of vaccination outweigh the potential harms, they will be able to access the vaccine.

Individuals planning on becoming pregnant should speak with their primary care provider before getting the vaccine. For additional information on this, consult the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada Statement on COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy.

Does the vaccine cause sterility?
No.

What if I'm breastfeeding?
Breastfeeding individuals can get the COVID-19 vaccine in Scarborough.

Breastfeeding individuals were excluded from the Phase 3 trials for the Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. Therefore, there is no data on the safety of the vaccines in lactating individuals or the effects of mRNA vaccines on the breastfed infant or on milk production.

For any individuals who are breastfeeding, the COVID-19 vaccine should be offered after counselling and informed consent that includes recognizing the insufficiency of evidence for the use of COVID-19 vaccine in the breastfeeding population.

For additional information on this, consult the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada Statement on COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy.

When can my kids get the vaccine?
So far, a vaccine has not been approved for children under the age of 16. Fortunately, kids have presented very few severe cases from infection. Research is underway to determine when those under the authorized ages can receive the vaccine.

Can my employer force me to take the vaccine?
The vaccine is not mandatory in Ontario.

If I don't take it now, will I get a chance later? Or will I be placed at the end of the line?
If you are part of a priority group now but defer, you will still be eligible to receive a vaccine when you are ready. However, it may be more difficult to book an appointment for you if we have moved on to another set of priority groups.

Our goal is to ensure that everybody across Ontario who is eligible and who wants the vaccine can get it. The sooner the majority of Ontarians are vaccinated, the sooner our lives can return
to normal. The pandemic will not be under control until the majority of Canadians are vaccinated.

To ensure we can vaccinate everyone who wants to be vaccinated as safely and as quickly as possible, it is important that people who are currently eligible for the vaccine get vaccinated as soon as it is offered to them.

**What if I’m behind on my regular immunization schedule? Can I still get it?**
Yes. This has no impact on your receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. We also encourage those who are behind on their immunizations to contact their health care provider to get up to date.

**Why am I not in a priority group?**
The provincial government has set out a Prioritization Framework that has been informed by Ontario’s COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. This aims to distribute vaccines in the most ethical way possible, vaccinating the most vulnerable populations first. These are people who have higher-risk outcomes from contracting the virus and/or are at a higher risk of being exposed to and spreading the virus.

As Ontario gets more vaccine supply, the program will expand to include additional groups. You can find more details about Ontario’s COVID-19 vaccination program, including the various phases of the program on [Ontario’s COVID-19 vaccine web page](https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-vaccine).

**Why are they prioritizing Indigenous peoples for this vaccine? Are we being treated as "guinea pigs"?**
Indigenous peoples are being given priority for the vaccine because many Indigenous people in Canada are at higher risk due to the impact of social determinants of health (e.g. income, housing circumstances) resulting from societal marginalization. Also many Indigenous peoples live in areas with less access to health care, putting those communities at a higher risk of outbreak.

**Do I still need to practice safety measures like wearing a mask after I have received the vaccine?**
It is still not known whether people who are vaccinated can contract and spread the virus despite being protected from its symptoms. It will take time before a significant enough number of people in the community are immune and the spread slows dramatically. Therefore, wearing a mask and following public health guidelines needs to continue.

**Do I need to get the vaccine if I have already had COVID-19?**
It is beneficial to get the vaccine even if you have had COVID-19 as natural immunity created by defeating an infection varies from person to person and we are not yet sure how long immunity lasts.

There have been cases of people getting COVID-19 more than once.

**How do I get a COVID-19 vaccine?**
Do I need to show identification to get the vaccine?
No. However, identification and contact information is extremely valuable for follow-up in booking the second dose of the vaccine and in case of any safety issues.

Do I need to have an Ontario Health Card to get the vaccine?
No.

How do I know when it is my turn to get the vaccine?
Due to a limited supply of vaccine, most people in Ontario are not yet eligible to receive a vaccination.

The Ministry has developed a prioritization framework which lays out the order of who is eligible to receive a vaccine. Your partnership of health care and community services organizations will make every effort to reach out to you directly, or an organization you are associated with, to provide you with the information you need when the time comes for you to book an appointment.