

# COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign FAQ

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## What you should know about the COVID-19 vaccines

With Health Canada's approval of four 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.

## Who is being vaccinated in Scarborough?

All parts of the vaccination program are dependent on vaccine supply and direction from the Government of Ontario. Ontario Ministry of Health has developed a [prioritization framework](#) to show who is eligible to be vaccinated.

Currently, SHN and our Scarborough Ontario Health Team partners are vaccinating people 18+ who live or work in an M1 postal code, and people 12-17 who live in an M1 hot-spot postal code.

For most people, the time between first and second vaccine doses is 16 weeks. The Government of Ontario has identified select groups of people who are eligible to receive their first doses earlier than 16 weeks.

For the most up-to-date list of people who are eligible for first dose vaccinations and the groups who are eligible for earlier second doses, please check [www.scarbvacine.ca](http://www.scarbvacine.ca)

## About COVID-19 vaccines

### How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

The vaccines give your body the opportunity to identify a specific protein found in the virus. From there, your body naturally builds an immune system response to fight the real virus when it encounters that same protein.

### 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.



### **How well does the vaccine work, can I still get COVID-19?**

While it is possible to get COVID-19 after receiving the vaccine, all of the approved vaccines have a high efficacy rate against severe disease, hospitalization, and death.

To get the best protection against COVID-19, it is important you receive the second dose at the appropriate time, even if you experience mild side effects after the first dose. If you miss your second dose, schedule another appointment as soon as possible

### **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 not of an age for approved use of a vaccine, 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 actions 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 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 a 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 way those three versions are designed, the second dose helps solidify your body's understanding of how to defend itself against this virus.

### **If I got the AstraZeneca vaccine for my first vaccine, do I have to get it for my second dose?**

Ontario has paused using the AstraZeneca vaccine for first doses, due to concerns around rare, but serious, side effects. Data from the UK strongly suggests that there is a much lower risk of serious side effects in second doses of AstraZeneca. The Ontario Government is committed to ensuring Ontarians who received the AstraZeneca for their first dose will have the ability to receive a second dose of AstraZeneca within 12 weeks of their first dose.

The province is reviewing available data from a UK clinical trial examining the safety and efficacy of using AstraZeneca for first doses and an mRNA vaccine for second doses.

The province will provide further guidance with respect to administering doses of two different vaccines in the near future and in advance of the 12-week interval when most people are needing to receive their second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine. When the time comes to receive a second dose, everyone who received a first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine will receive either an AstraZeneca or mRNA vaccine for their second dose.

### **What ingredients are in the vaccines?**

Visit the pages of each manufacturer to find ingredient lists posted.

Health Canada also lists the ingredients of the four vaccines that they have approved. They can be found on their website here:

[Pfizer-BioNTech](#)

[Moderna](#)

[AstraZeneca](#)

[Janssen \(Johnson & Johnson vaccine\)](#)

### **Do the vaccines contain pork? Are they Halal?**

There are no animal products in the Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca or Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines. They are considered Halal. Check 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 are 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 the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines.

### **What are the risks associated with the AstraZeneca vaccine?**

The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine appears to be associated with rare cases of serious blood clots, including blood clots in the brain and other critical organs. Similar cases have also been reported following the Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine.

These blood clots have two important features: they can occur 4 to 28 days after vaccination, and they are associated with low platelets (tiny blood cells that help form blood clots to stop bleeding). Doctors are calling this “vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia” (VITT), “vaccine-induced prothrombotic immune thrombocytopenia” (VIPIT), or “thrombotic thrombocytopenic syndrome” (TTS). These blood clots are different from the blood clots most people are familiar with; they are more aggressive and are more likely to cause death or severe disability, even with early diagnosis and treatment.

As of April 28, 2021, the rate of VITT in Canada has been estimated to be approximately 1 per 100,000 doses. Nearly all reported cases have occurred after the first dose. There have been few reported cases of VITT with the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine, so it is difficult to calculate a precise rate, but the incidence of VITT appears to be approximately 1 case per 500,000 vaccine doses administered.

### **What should you look out for if you received the AstraZeneca or Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine?**

You should speak to a health care professional if you have unusual or severe symptoms after any COVID-19 vaccine. If you experience the following symptoms that start between 4 and 28 days after vaccination, it might indicate that you have VITT:

- a severe headache that does not go away;
- a seizure; difficulty moving part of your body;
- new blurry vision or double vision that does not go away;
- difficulty speaking; shortness of breath;
- severe chest, back, or abdominal pain;
- unusual bleeding or bruising;
- new reddish or purplish spots, or blood blisters;
- or new severe swelling, pain, or colour change of an arm or a leg.

These symptoms can also be a sign of other serious conditions and should be assessed in an emergency department.

### **What should you do if you have concerning symptoms after the AstraZeneca or Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine?**

If you have severe symptoms such as those listed above, you should go to the nearest emergency department immediately. If you have other symptoms that are not severe, you can discuss them (virtually or in-person) with your primary healthcare professional. You should tell the health care providers who see you that you received the AstraZeneca or Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine and give them the date you got vaccinated. If the healthcare professional who assesses you is concerned, you may have scans done and additional bloodwork collected. When recognized early, VITT can be successfully treated.

### **Do healthcare professionals know how to diagnose and treat VITT?**

Health care professionals and scientists in Ontario have been working with experts in Canada, and around the world, to better understand VITT. The Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table has summarized what we know about VITT right now and has published guides for healthcare professionals outside and inside of hospitals to help them diagnose and treat VITT.

### **Could other COVID-19 vaccines available in Ontario cause VITT?**

There have been no confirmed cases of VITT with the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.

### **Was development of the vaccine rushed?**

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

In many ways, the incredible speed of the development of this vaccine simply showed us the extraordinary feats we are capable of when we set our collective will towards a problem. This

accomplishment should be looked at as inspiration for solving other problems that are considered “insurmountable”.

### **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 sample to learn from (AstraZeneca and Janssen), of the virus’ means of attacking your cells. This prepares our immune system to look out for, and defend against, the virus 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. Protection has not yet developed, so you are still susceptible to getting infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 for a period of time 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.

### **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. Most serious reactions will occur shortly after injection, and vaccine 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 after their shot 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)

If you received the AstraZeneca vaccine and you experience the following symptoms that start between 4 and 28 days after vaccination, it might indicate that you have a severe, but treatable side effect:

- a severe headache that does not go away;
- a seizure; difficulty moving part of your body;
- new blurry vision or double vision that does not go away;
- difficulty speaking; shortness of breath;
- severe chest, back, or abdominal pain;
- unusual bleeding or bruising;
- new reddish or purplish spots, or blood blisters;
- or new severe swelling, pain, or colour change of an arm or a leg.

These symptoms can also be a sign of other serious conditions and should be assessed in an emergency department.

### **What are the longer-term side effects of COVID-19 vaccines?**

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

As noted above, the AstraZeneca and Janssen (Johnson Johnson) vaccines are associated with a rare blood clotting condition. Scientists are studying people who have had his side-effect for its long-term impacts on their health.

For more information on adverse events following immunization (AEFIs) or to report an AEFI visit [Public Health Ontario's vaccine safety web page](#).

### **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!).

### **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. Which vaccine a person gets depends on availability of supply.

### **Will the vaccine alter my DNA? Will mRNA stay in my body?**

Vaccines that use mRNA technology, like the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines, 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 for defence against the virus that it has provided.

The AstraZeneca and Janssen vaccines are “viral vector-based vaccines” which use a harmless virus as a delivery system. This “vector” virus is not the virus that causes COVID-19. 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 defences against the virus that causes COVID-19.

### **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 just over 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 sooner a majority of Ontarians are vaccinated, the sooner our lives can return to normal.

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

### **Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?**

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 effectively.

### **I'm not considered "high risk". COVID-19 isn't that serious. Do I need a vaccine?**

Over 3 million people have died of COVID-19 since the pandemic began. 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 is a growing group of people called "long-haulers" that include inexplicably healthy, young individuals who have been impacted in this way. Many people 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 people in your community who may be high-risk and immunocompromised in a way that means they aren't able to get a shot. When a majority of people in the community are vaccinated, people who cannot be vaccinated and are high-risk are protected because it reduces the chances that the virus can spread through the community.

### **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.

### **What about those who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant?**

People who are pregnant are considered high-risk for COVID-19 and encouraged to get vaccinated

as quickly as possible with an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna).

People who are 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. There has not been a single case of sterility linked to a COVID-19 vaccination.

**What if I'm breastfeeding?**

Breastfeeding people can get the COVID-19 vaccine in Scarborough. If breastfeeding people have questions about the vaccine, they should discuss them with their health care provider or vaccinator.

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

**Is it true that people with any allergy should not get the vaccine?**

The Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology identifies the risk for serious allergic reaction as low and states, "the majority of individuals with a history of allergy will be able to safely receive vaccination for COVID-19". This includes those with a history of serious allergic reactions or anaphylaxis to substances that are not an ingredient in this vaccine, and those with food allergy, eczema, allergic rhinitis (hayfever), asthma, or stinging insect allergy.

**I've heard that the pneumonia shot will help protect me against getting sick with COVID-19. Is that true?**

The pneumonia shot can help protect you against getting really sick with other types of viruses, like influenza, but does not protect from the virus that causes COVID-19.

**Is it true that people who have received the shingles vaccine should not receive, or would not benefit from, the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Shingrix (shingles vaccine) is an inactivated vaccine so the interval between it and other vaccines does not matter. Everyone who can, should get the COVID-19 vaccine.

**When can my kids get the vaccine?**

In Ontario, people aged 12 (at the time of their vaccination) to 17 are eligible to be vaccinated with the Pfizer 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?**

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.

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

### **What if I'm behind on my regular immunization schedule? Can I still get the COVID-19 vaccination?**

Yes. This has no impact on your receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. We encourage people 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.

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](#).

### **Why is the rollout plan prioritizing Indigenous peoples for this vaccine? Are they being treated as "guinea pigs"?**

Indigenous peoples are being given priority for the vaccine because many Indigenous peoples in Canada are at higher risk than the majority for severe COVID-19 outcomes. This is due to the impact of social determinants of health (e.g. income disparity, multi-generational housing, etc.). Some of these risk factors result from societal marginalization. Risk to Indigenous families is exacerbated by the fact that access to health care is sometimes limited, putting people living in those communities at a higher risk of outbreak.

### **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?**

You will need to bring proof of your identity at your vaccine appointment. This can be photo ID (drivers' license, passport, PR card) or non-photo ID. You also need to bring proof of your address (a piece of mail with your address on it, a bill, or a rental agreement). If you do not have any form of ID, please speak to staff at the vaccination clinic when you register.

### **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?**

For the most up to date list of those who are eligible to receive the vaccine visit [www.scarbvaccine.ca](http://www.scarbvaccine.ca).