

COVID-19 VACCINE FACT SHEET

HOW DOES THE VACCINE PROTECT ME AND OTHERS AGAINST COVID-19?

COVID-19 vaccines trigger your immune system to protect you from COVID-19. When you are immune to COVID-19, you can be exposed to the virus without becoming infected or, if you do become infected, the vaccine prevents more severe illness. The more people in a community who are vaccinated and therefore protected from COVID-19, the harder it is for the virus to spread.

WHICH VACCINE WILL I GET?

Clinics in First Nations communities, Indigenous-specific vaccine clinics and provincial clinics provide mRNA vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna). In most cases, the same brand of vaccine will be offered for your second dose, although, depending on availability, the alternate mRNA vaccine may be offered. These vaccines are interchangeable, so there is no worry with "mixing and matching" doses. An mRNA vaccine is also recommended as a second dose for anyone who received AstraZeneca as a first dose.

WHAT IS THE BOOSTER SHOT AND SHOULD I GET IT?

While the vaccines are highly effective, there is a gradual decline in protection over time. As a result, all people can benefit from a booster shot months after their initial vaccine series to boost protection against infection that may have waned over time. The first roll out starts November 2021 and includes the general population age 70 and older, Indigenous people 12 and older, and people with compromised immune systems. The First Nations Health Authority is working with communities to provide in-community booster clinics, beginning with rural and remote communities and those with residents who received their second doses more than six months ago and have the shortest intervals between the first and second doses. Those who received their first two doses through provincial clinics will receive an invite to get their booster dose from the provincial online vaccination system. As vaccines for youth 12-17 were not available until May 2021, some youth may not yet require a booster dose.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS?

The most common kinds of reactions occur because your immune system is responding to the vaccine. These side effects are usually mild to moderate: pain in the arm at the site of the injection, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain and low-grade fever. These reactions may be stronger for some people, particularly after the second dose. Allergic reactions are rare, and treatable by the medical staff who administer the vaccine, which is why you are asked to stay at least 15 minutes after receiving the vaccine. Adverse reactions are also rare and are being [tracked here](#) by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

DOES MY CHILD NEED TO GET VACCINATED?

Yes. With newer variants emerging, we are seeing more cases of children with COVID-19. The fact is, we can't predict which children will become severely ill or have long-term effects from COVID-19, such as MIS-C (multisystem inflammatory syndrome) and long COVID (symptoms that last for months). There have also been 17 deaths of children due to COVID-19 in Canada. Health Canada [approved vaccines for children ages 5 - 11](#) on November 19, and B.C. will have a roll out plan very soon. The vaccines are similar to the ones for adults, albeit in smaller doses. Parents can register their children now at gov.bc.ca/getvaccinated and they will be notified when they can book an appointment.

IS THE VACCINE SAFE FOR BREASTFEEDING PEOPLE?

Yes. Babies under one year of age may be at higher risk of severe illness if they catch COVID-19. The vaccine helps your body produce antibodies that will protect you from getting sick if you are exposed to COVID-19. These protective antibodies pass into your milk and may also protect your baby from infection. There are currently no known serious risks when getting a COVID-19 vaccine while breastfeeding (like providing expressed human milk) to either the person being vaccinated or the child.

IS THE VACCINE SAFE FOR PREGNANT PEOPLE?

Yes. Pregnant people are at increased risk of illness from COVID-19 infection, and can be vaccinated at any time during pregnancy. If you are unvaccinated and infected with COVID-19 during your pregnancy, you are three times more likely to end up in the intensive care unit (ICU) than those infected with COVID-19 who are not pregnant. Preterm birth and admission of baby to neonatal intensive care units have been shown to be more common among pregnant people with COVID-19. There are currently no known serious risks (such as an increased risk of miscarriage or possible birth defects) when getting a COVID-19 vaccine while pregnant to either the person being vaccinated or the child.

HOW WAS A VACCINE CREATED SO QUICKLY?

With high levels of government funding around the world, scientists were able to develop vaccines quickly by sharing information across countries, and building on technology they already use in existing, successful vaccines. Scientists have spent more than 30 years developing mRNA technology (the technology Pfizer and Moderna used to develop their vaccines). Health Canada was able to approve the COVID-19 vaccines quickly by delaying approval of other medicines and vaccines and prioritizing COVID-19 vaccines for approval.

HOW DO I KNOW IF THE VACCINE IS SAFE?

After the administration of tens of millions of doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in Canada alone, we have strong evidence that they are safe and highly effective. This includes across different ages (including Elders and youth 12 and up), sex, race and ethnicity. Canada's [vaccine approval process](#) is among the most rigorous in the world.

WHAT IF I HAVE A FEAR OF NEEDLES?

It is estimated that up to 25% of adults have needle fears and approximately 10% of the adult population have needle phobia. Talk to a trusted doctor, community health nurse, or pharmacist about options to make sure the injection is painless (yes, it can be done!), and other ways to reduce stress and anxiety during your appointment.

HOW DO I TALK TO FRIENDS OR FAMILY WHO ARE HESITANT TO GET THE VACCINE?

If you have friends or family who are postponing or refusing the COVID-19 vaccine, you are likely concerned for them – and perhaps a bit frustrated. Read through this First Nations Health Authority [1-page guide](#) for steps on how to approach these difficult conversations with family and friends.

WHERE CAN I GET VACCINATED?

You can get vaccinated in-community or at Northern Health Vaccination Clinics. Visit the [Get Vaccinated](#) section of our COVID page for step-by-step instructions.

WHAT IS THE BC VACCINE CARD?

The BC Vaccine Card is how to show proof of your COVID-19 vaccination. This virtual card is required for attending certain social and recreational settings and events. Visit [the provincial website](#) to get the card.

Sources:

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