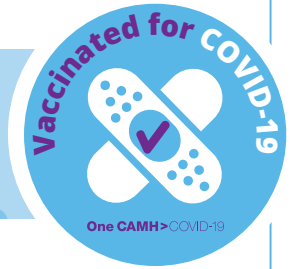


COVID-19 VACCINE

What do I need to know about the COVID-19 vaccines?

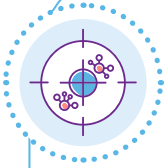


What is COVID-19?

- COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the 2019 coronavirus.
- COVID-19 can spread when someone who has the virus coughs, sneezes, talks or even breathes near another person.
- Some people might have the virus and not know it, and still spread it to others.
- People with COVID-19 may have the following symptoms:
 - cough
 - fever
 - tiredness
 - poor sense of taste or smell
 - trouble breathing
 - diarrhea or vomiting
 - chills
 - runny nose.
- Some people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms. Others may not feel sick at all. But some people with COVID-19 get very sick and can die.

What is a vaccine?

- A vaccine tells your immune system to make antibodies that help your body fight a germ that could hurt you.
- Scientists make vaccines to protect you and other people against germs, including bacteria and viruses such as the coronavirus.
- We already get vaccines for other illnesses, like polio, the flu and measles.
- The COVID-19 vaccine works with your body's natural defences to fight off COVID-19, just like other vaccines fight off other germs.
- The COVID-19 vaccine is given through a needle.
- Doctors think fewer people will get sick with COVID-19 if more people have the vaccine.
- Doctors think it is important for everyone to get the COVID-19 vaccine.



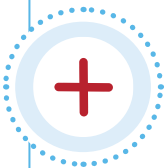
How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

- Canada has approved four COVID-19 vaccines that were developed by four companies: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson (Janssen).
- Each vaccine was developed differently, but they are all safe and effective for protecting against COVID-19. See the [FAQ info sheet](#) in this series for information on the differences between the four vaccines.
- The COVID-19 vaccines train your immune system to make antibodies against the coronavirus. If you are exposed to the virus after getting the vaccine, the antibodies are ready to help fight it off and keep you from getting sick.
- None of the COVID-19 vaccines contain the COVID-19 virus, so they cannot give you COVID-19. Instead, the vaccines give your body a recipe to make antibodies.



How many shots of the COVID-19 vaccines do I need?

- The Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines require two shots for you to be fully protected against COVID-19.
 - One dose from these three vaccines is not enough. It is very important to get the second shot of the vaccine even if you have mild symptoms after the first dose.
 - The person giving you the vaccine will tell you when your second shot will be, so pay attention to the date.
- The Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine only requires one shot for you to be fully protected against COVID-19.



Are the vaccines safe? How do we know?

- Yes, all four vaccines are safe, and they are the main way we will beat COVID-19.
- The vaccines will prevent people from dying or needing to go to the hospital because of COVID-19. Please talk to your health care provider if you are worried about any of the vaccines.
- The vaccines do not give you COVID-19. They work with your immune system so that your body will be ready to fight the virus if you come in contact with it.
- Doctors and scientists have worked to make sure that the vaccines are safe.
 - Scientists tested the vaccines with many, many people. They gave all the people in the tests a needle. Some people had a vaccine in their needle and some people got a needle that didn't have a vaccine in it.
 - Then the scientists looked at what happened to the people in both groups over time.
 - Almost all the people who got a vaccine didn't get sick. A lot more people got sick who did not get a vaccine.



What are the side effects of the vaccines?

- Common side effects include:
 - sore arm
 - redness and swelling where you got the needle
 - feeling tired
 - headache
 - mild fever or chills
 - muscle ache or joint pain.
- These side effects are usually mild or moderate and go away after a few days.



Who should get the vaccines?

- Everyone should get the vaccine if they can.
- This includes people who have had the virus before and people who have never had the virus.
- It is really important for certain people to get the vaccine because it is harder for them to stay safe from COVID-19 and if they get the virus they are likely to get very sick. These groups include:
 - older adults
 - First Nations, Inuit and Métis adults (see more information about the COVID-19 vaccine in these populations developed by [Maad'ookiing Mshkiki – Sharing Medicine](#))
 - people who are staying at or working in certain high-risk places (for example, retirement homes, shelters and hospitals)
 - people who get a lot of home care visits, where someone comes in to help them
 - people with certain chronic illnesses (for example, severe mental illness, diabetes and asthma).



Who should not get the vaccines?

- There are no COVID-19 vaccines approved for anyone under age 16. More tests are being done right now to make sure the vaccines are safe for children and youth.
- If you have any symptoms that make you think you might have COVID-19, you might have to wait to get the vaccine.
- If you have an allergy to **polyethylene glycol (PEG)**, you should not get an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna). Polyethylene glycol is a common ingredient in products such as medication, laxatives and cough syrup.

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- If you have an allergy to **tromethamine**, you should not get the Moderna vaccine. Tromethamine is a component only found in the Moderna vaccine.
- If you are allergic to **polysorbate 80**, you should not get the AstraZeneca or Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines. Polysorbate is a common ingredient in products such as medication and makeup.
- If you had a serious allergic reaction to your first shot of a COVID-19 vaccine, ask your doctor if you should get a different type of vaccine.



What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

- The vaccines have not yet been tested on people who are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Since other vaccines are safe for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding, experts think the COVID-19 vaccines should be safe too.
- Speak with your doctor or care team before getting the vaccine. They will talk with you about the benefits and risks of vaccination and the risks of COVID-19 infection if you are pregnant or breastfeeding to see what is best for you.
- It is important to tell the person giving you the vaccine that you are pregnant or breastfeeding.



What about my medications? Will the vaccines affect them?

- Most people who take medication don't need to worry about how their medications mix with the vaccine. This is a good question to ask your doctor or pharmacist.
 - If you take anticoagulants (blood thinners), tell the person who is giving you the vaccine so they can try to reduce any bruising you might get from the needle.



Do alcohol, cannabis or other drugs affect how the vaccines work?

- No, they do not. You do not need to stop drinking alcohol before or after the vaccine.
- However, alcohol affects the immune system and how well vaccines work, so try to avoid heavy drinking around the time of the vaccination.
- So far, there are no known problems with getting the vaccine if you use cannabis or other drugs.
- Talk to your doctor or care team about your use of alcohol, cannabis and other drugs so you can create a safety plan before you get the vaccine.



Can I be allergic to the vaccines?

- Yes, you can, but it is very unlikely. Most people will not be allergic to the vaccines.
- If you are allergic to any of the ingredients in one of the vaccines, you should not get that particular vaccine. However, you can still get one of the other vaccines.
- If you have an allergy to **polyethylene glycol (PEG)**, you should not get an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna).
- If you are allergic to **polysorbate 80**, you should not get the AstraZeneca or Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines.
- If you are allergic to **tromethamine**, you should not get the Moderna vaccine. Tromethamine is an ingredient only in the Moderna vaccine.
- Experts think the mRNA vaccines are safe for people with most other allergies and people who are allergic to other vaccines. That is because what is inside those vaccines is different than what is inside most other vaccines.
- If you get a mild to moderate allergic reaction (e.g., swelling, hives) within four hours of getting the vaccine, you should get assessed by an allergist before your second vaccine shot.
- There are no metals, antibiotics or food products in any of the vaccines (which means no gelatin, so the vaccines are halal and kosher).



Why is it important for people with mental illness and/or addiction to get the vaccine?

- This pandemic has been very hard for everyone, especially people with mental illness or alcohol and other drug problems.
- People with serious mental illness are more vulnerable to getting COVID-19 and becoming very sick.
- People who take drugs, or are addicted to drugs, are more vulnerable to getting COVID-19.
- Vaccines protect the people who get them, and the people around them.
- The more people who say yes and get the vaccine, the sooner our lives can return to normal.
- People who do not get the vaccine will still be worried about getting COVID-19 and passing it on to others. They won't feel as free to do things when the pandemic is over.



How will I know when I can get one of the vaccines? How will I know where to go?

- Your doctor or care team member will let you know when you can get the vaccine and where to go.
- You can also check the Ontario government's COVID-19 vaccine website for updates: covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-ontario



Do I have to pay for the vaccine?

- You do not have to pay for the vaccine. The Canadian government is paying for everyone to get a vaccine.
- If you get the vaccine, it will not change or cause problems with money that you get from the government. That includes disability support payments from the government (ODSP).



How do I decide if I want to get the vaccine? How do I decide which one to get?

- The best person to talk to about the vaccine is your doctor. You can also talk to family, friends or other people you trust.
- They can help you understand all of the information you need to think about before you decide what to do.
- People you trust, like family and friends, can also help you talk to your doctor about the vaccine.
- These CAMH COVID-19 information sheets are also helpful:
www.camh.ca/covidvaccine
- Currently, you are unable to choose which vaccine you get because there is a limited supply of each vaccine. But remember, all approved vaccines are safe and effective.
- If you are worried about a certain vaccine, talk to your doctor or care team.



What if I don't want to get a vaccine? What are my rights?

- Getting a COVID-19 vaccine in Ontario is voluntary. You can discuss whether getting the vaccine is right for you with your doctor, care team, family and other people you trust.
- If you decide to get the vaccine, you will first need to sign a consent form to show that you understand that you are getting the vaccine and that you agreed to get it. You can change your mind at any time before getting the vaccine. You can also ask for more information.
- Talk to your doctor if you want more information about your rights.



What if I have a substitute decision maker?

- If you have a substitute decision maker, that person will make this decision for you. They will need to consider any thoughts you have expressed in the past about vaccination. If you didn't say anything before about getting the vaccine, your substitute decision maker will decide if getting the vaccine is in your best interest.
- Before you get the vaccine, your substitute decision maker will sign the consent form on your behalf.
- Talk to your doctor if you want more information about your rights.

Notes

If you have questions, please talk to your doctor.

This information sheet is not intended to be a resource for people who require screening for COVID-19 or who are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911 immediately or go to your nearest emergency department.

For more information, visit www.camh.ca/covidvaccine

Adapted with permission from CAMH's Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre