

COVID-19 Vaccine Information

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COVID-19 vaccines are saving lives. They help protect those at highest risk of illness or death, especially older adults. The COVID-19 vaccines are provided free of charge and have been given to millions of people around the world. They have been shown to be both safe and effective. Currently, the vaccines available in Canada include: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD.

It's strongly recommended that everybody gets the vaccine when it's offered to them. You will only be offered a vaccine that is safe and effective for your age group.

What does the vaccine do?

Like a flu shot, the COVID-19 vaccine helps your body build the protection you need to prevent you from getting sick if you are exposed to the virus. The vaccine does not contain the COVID-19 virus. When you receive the COVID-19 vaccine, it causes your body to create antibodies to help you to fight the infection if you are exposed to the real virus.

Should I get the vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccines are saving lives and are the best way to protect yourself and your family. The more people who are vaccinated and protected against COVID-19, the harder it is for the virus to spread.

The vaccines have been shown to be very effective in protecting older adults from severe disease and hospitalization due to COVID-19. The benefits of getting the vaccine outweigh the risks associated with not getting vaccinated. We encourage all adults to book an appointment for vaccination once they are eligible.

How safe is the vaccine?

Only vaccines that have been shown to be safe and effective are approved for use in Canada. Once authorized for use, all vaccines are closely monitored by public health officials and Health Canada for their continued safety. The COVID-19 vaccines used in Canada have been administered to millions of people around the world and have been shown to be both safe and effective.

The most common side-effects include some soreness of the arm where a person has been injected, body chills, feeling tired and feverish. These are common side effects and do not pose a risk to health.

Infrequently, allergic reactions occur following vaccination. This is why people who are vaccinated are asked to wait in the clinic for 15 minutes. These reactions are treatable.

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Rare instances of blood clots, mostly in people under the age of 55, have been reported in Europe following administration of the AstraZeneca vaccine. As of Mar. 29, out of an abundance of caution, Health Canada restricted the use of this vaccine to people age 55 and older.

COVID-19 is a serious illness for people over 55 and thus, people in this age group are advised to accept the first vaccine available to them.

How effective are the vaccines?

Vaccines begin to work two to three weeks after vaccination. The first people to be vaccinated in B.C. were residents of care homes and health care workers. Our data shows that within two to three weeks of starting vaccinations, there was a drop in the number of COVID-19 infections and a reduction in hospitalizations and deaths among vaccinated seniors. All of the vaccines approved in Canada have been shown to significantly reduce the risk of severe disease and death associated with COVID-19 infection.

Can a person get COVID-19 illness from the vaccine? Will it protect me from COVID-19 immediately?

You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine, however, if you were exposed to the virus before you received your vaccine, you may be incubating the virus and not realize you have COVID-19 until after you are vaccinated. It takes about two to three weeks to build up your protection against COVID-19 following vaccination. This means if you contracted the virus before getting the vaccine, or within the two-week period following vaccination, you may still become ill from COVID-19.

If I'm a home-bound senior, should I still get vaccinated?

It is strongly recommended that all seniors get vaccinated, even if they are home-bound. The benefits of getting vaccinated far outweigh the risks associated with getting infected with COVID-19. Seniors have been shown to be most vulnerable to severe disease and also death associated with infection. If you are physically unable to attend a vaccination clinic, the VCH home immunization team can visit your house.

Who should not get the vaccine?

The majority of people will be able to safely receive the vaccine. Those who have had a severe allergic reaction to components of these vaccines should speak to their physician before booking an appointment for vaccination.

How do I book an appointment for vaccination?

For information on who is eligible to get vaccinated, and for information on how to get vaccinated, please visit the VCH webpage www.vch.ca/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine. This includes on how to book your appointment for vaccination at a clinic location that is near to your home.

If you have questions or concerns about the vaccine and its safety, please visit the following websites: [BC Centre for Disease Control](http://www.bccdc.ca), [Government of BC](http://www2.gov.bc.ca) and [Government of Canada](http://www.canada.ca). You can also speak to your health-care provider if you have further questions about the vaccine.