

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

These are answers to COVID-19 vaccine questions for Health Care workers in the Eastern Ontario Health Unit (EOHU) region. We hope these will help the people who work in your organization as they make their decision to get vaccinated.

1. Why should health care workers get the vaccine?

Health care workers have been identified as a priority group for COVID-19 vaccination in Ontario and in the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommendations. By getting the COVID-19 vaccine, you are not only protecting yourself, but you are also protecting those you care for, and the health care system's capacity to deliver needed services during the pandemic.

2. How can I know that the vaccine is safe?

All COVID-19 vaccines used in Canada have been approved by Health Canada. They have had to meet the same rigorous standards that all vaccines must meet in order to be approved. Clinical trials have shown that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. Furthermore, more than 200 million doses of COVID vaccines have been administered around the world, and all evidence to date has confirmed the findings of the clinical trials – that the vaccines are safe and offer effective protection from COVID-19.

As with all vaccines, Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada continue to monitor their ongoing safety and effectiveness.

3. What is the shot like?

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are provided in 2 doses by a needle in the upper arm. You should get the first dose as soon as possible. The second dose is given up to 16 weeks after the first dose. It is very important to get both doses. While you have some protection after the first dose, you will have the most protection after getting both doses.

Additional vaccines may be approved for use in the near future, which may or may not require a second dose. Instructions will be provided to you at the time of your vaccination.

4. What happens if I wait to get the vaccine?

Health care workers are currently among the first in line for the vaccine. If you wait, it may take longer to get the vaccine when you want it. Getting the first dose as soon as possible will give you protection while COVID-19 cases are still very high in the community.

5. What are the common side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

The most common side effects are mild to moderate and resolve after a few days. They include pain at the injection site, headache, fatigue, muscle and joint pain, chills and fever.

Even if you experience mild side to moderate effects, it is important to receive the second dose. You may get the same side effects with your second dose.



6. Are there any serious side effects?

Serious side effects are very rare. They include:

- hives
- swelling of mouth and throat
- trouble breathing, hoarseness or wheezing
- a fever over 40C or 104F
- seizures

If you experience serious side effects, you should seek medical help immediately. Do not get a second dose of the vaccine if you have serious side effects following the first dose. Speak to your health care provider for advice.

7. Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. There is no live COVID-19 virus in the vaccine.

8. Is the vaccine mandatory?

COVID-19 vaccination is not mandatory in Ontario; however, it is strongly encouraged for health care workers, especially those who work with vulnerable people. Your employer may have a policy that requires you to have the COVID-19 vaccine.

9. If I had a reaction to a different vaccine in the past, can I still get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Check with your doctor or health care provider if you have had a serious allergic reaction to a vaccine in the past. They will look at your medical records and help you make the decision.

10. If I tested positive for COVID-19 in the past, should I still get the vaccine?

Yes. You will have some immunity from your infection, but no one knows how long it will last. There are cases where people have gotten COVID-19 again before they could get vaccinated. You should not get the vaccine if you are sick or have COVID-19 right now. Wait until you are better to get the shot.

11. I just got vaccinated for something else. Can I still get the COVID-19 vaccine now?

You should wait 14 days before receiving the COVID-19 vaccine if you have had another type of vaccine.

After receiving your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, you should not receive any other vaccines for 28 days. If for some reason you need another vaccine within 28 days, discuss this with your doctor or health care provider.

12. Will the COVID-19 vaccine change my DNA?

No, the vaccine does not and cannot change your DNA in any way.

13. Why should I get vaccinated if COVID-19 infection has a high survival rate?

COVID-19 can be a serious illness for many people. Among people who are diagnosed with COVID-19 in Canada, about 1 in 13 people require hospitalization, and tragically, about 1 in 40 (~ 2.5%) die.

For some people, symptoms can last for months. These people are called long haulers. The virus can damage the heart, brain and lungs and increase the risk of long-term health problems. Even young, healthy people can feel unwell for weeks to months following the COVID-19 infection.

The short-term side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are less than the risk and potential long-term health damage caused by the COVID-19 virus.

14. Who should not get the vaccine?

The following people should not get the COVID-19 vaccine:

- People who have allergies to the COVID-19 vaccine ingredients should not be vaccinated. Talk to your doctor or health care provider if you are unsure.
- People who have had a serious allergic reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine (first dose) should not receive a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Children under age 16 should not receive the vaccine at this time, as it has not yet been approved for this age group.
- Anyone who is sick, has COVID-19, or got a different vaccine in the past two weeks should wait to receive the vaccine.

Advice for special populations:

- Pregnant women or those trying to get pregnant – Vaccine may be offered if a risk assessment deems that the benefits outweigh the potential risks for the individual and the fetus, and if informed consent includes discussion about the absence of evidence on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in this population.
- People who are breastfeeding – Vaccine may be offered to individuals in the authorized age group who are breastfeeding if a risk assessment deems that the benefits outweigh the potential risks for the individual and the infant, and if informed consent includes discussion about the absence of evidence on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in this population.
- People with compromised immune systems – Vaccine may be offered if a risk assessment deems that the benefits outweigh the potential risks for the individual, and if informed consent includes discussion about the absence of evidence on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in this population and the possibility that individuals who are immunosuppressed may have a diminished immune response to any of the authorized COVID-19 vaccines.
- People with autoimmune diseases – Vaccine may be offered if a risk assessment deems that the benefits outweigh the potential risks for the individual, and if informed consent includes discussion about the insufficiency of evidence on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in these populations.

15. Should I wait for a specific type or brand of COVID-19 vaccine (e.g. Pfizer BioNTech, Moderna or other COVID vaccine)?

No. All available COVID-19 vaccines have been approved by Health Canada and are effective. It is important to get the vaccine when it is offered to you, regardless of which brand or type of vaccine is available.

16. What is an mRNA vaccine?

mRNA vaccines are a new type of vaccine; however, researchers have been studying and working with these vaccines for quite some time. mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that will trigger an immune response. Once triggered, our body then makes antibodies. These antibodies help us fight the infection if the real virus does enter our body in the future.

Like all vaccines, people who are vaccinated gain protection without ever having to risk the serious consequences of getting sick from being exposed to the virus. People also can't get COVID-19 from the vaccine itself. mRNA vaccines do not use the live virus that causes COVID-19.

Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are mRNA vaccines.

17. If I become ill after getting the shot, will I be paid while I cannot come to work?

Yes. If you are unwell after you receive your COVID-19 vaccination and are unable to work, you will be eligible for paid pandemic leave for the period of illness for as long as 14 consecutive calendar days. Please discuss with your Supervisor and Administrator if you need to take pandemic leave.

If you experience mild COVID-19 symptoms after vaccination, follow the instructions from your workplace.

18. I have heard there are new strains of the COVID-19 virus. Is there information about the effectiveness of the existing vaccines on the new strain?

Currently, experts believe the vaccines will work with the new strains. There is no evidence to suggest that the vaccines will not be effective against the new strains, however this is currently being explored through studies.

19. Will I need to get the vaccine every year or is it just the two doses?

At this time, the Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are only administered in two doses, up to 16 weeks apart.

It is not yet known if the vaccine will need to be repeated in the future, as there is not enough information on the long-term protection provided by the vaccine.

20. If I travel outside of the country after receiving the vaccine, do I still need to isolate for 14 days after returning from my trip?

[The Government of Canada strongly advises against non-essential travel outside of Canada until further notice.](#) If you do travel outside of Canada, you are required to isolate for 2 weeks immediately upon returning. This requirement remains in effect even if you have had the COVID-19 vaccine. There may be exceptions for workers travelling for essential reasons. For more information on travel restrictions and requirements, see [Travel restrictions, exemptions and advice.](#)

21. Should I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I have food or seasonal allergies?

Please talk with your physician or health care provider to learn if it is safe for you to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

22. Can I still get or transmit COVID-19 after being vaccinated?

The COVID-19 vaccine is very effective at preventing symptoms in people who get it. During clinical trials, the Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna vaccines were shown to be about 94-95% effective in preventing illness from COVID-19 in individuals who received both doses of the vaccine.

There is a small chance that you may still get COVID-19 after being vaccinated. It is important to continue taking public health measures such as physical distancing, wearing a mask, and staying home if you are sick.

It is not known if you can still give the infection to someone who has not been immunized if you have been exposed to the virus.