

COVID-19 Vaccine Fact Sheet

Information about COVID-19 Vaccines

This information is current as of January 14, 2021.

! IMPORTANT: The following information is based only on COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use by Health Canada, including Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna (Please note: Moderna not currently available in Halton).

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a viral infection that primarily affects the lungs. Symptoms of COVID-19 may include cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, tiredness and loss of smell or taste. Some people infected with the virus have no symptoms at all, while others have symptoms that range from mild to severe. Very rarely, some children can get a serious inflammatory condition (multisystem inflammatory illness). The long-term effects of COVID-19 are not fully known. Some people are at greater risk of getting COVID-19 because of their work, living conditions or pre-existing health condition.

Vaccine authorization in Canada

Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have been tested in large clinical trials to ensure they meet rigorous safety standards and are licensed and approved by Health Canada. Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada continue to monitor the ongoing safety and effectiveness of all vaccines approved in Canada. Vaccines that have been authorized by Health Canada are safe, reliable and can help protect you, your family and our community from COVID-19.

How COVID-19 vaccines work

COVID-19 vaccines use messenger RNA (mRNA) that provides instructions to cells in our bodies to make a viral protein from the coronavirus. These “spike proteins”, although harmless to us, will trigger our body to start making antibodies. Antibodies are proteins that our immune system produce when it detects a harmful substance or virus. The mRNA is then degraded by normal cellular mechanisms and the spike proteins are destroyed by the immune system. If we are exposed to the virus, our new antibodies will recognize the virus and work to protect us from getting sick.

COVID-19 vaccines are not live vaccines. They do not contain the virus. Therefore, you cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

Vaccination process

Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines require two doses.

- The Pfizer-BioNTech doses are given 21 to 28 days apart for people 16 years of age and older.
- The Moderna doses are given at least 28 days apart for people 18 years of age and older.

Individuals must complete the two doses with the same vaccine product.

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines should not be given concurrently with other vaccines, monoclonal antibodies or plasma. Individuals must wait 28 days after completion of 2-doses of COVID-19 vaccine before administering another vaccine, unless it is required for post-exposure prophylaxis.

Vaccine benefits

Two doses of the vaccine are required for better protection. After completing the two doses, it may take another one to two weeks to achieve maximum protection against COVID-19. At this time, there is no information on the long-term protection of this vaccine. In trials, the vaccines were between 94 and 95 per cent effective.

Side effects and risks

Some people may experience side effects from the vaccine, but they will likely be mild and resolve after a few days. Some of the symptoms are part of the body’s response to developing immunity. The most frequently reported side effects are similar to those reported following the seasonal influenza vaccination and routine immunizations.

Side effects that have been reported in clinical trials for these vaccines include:

Very common ≥10% (more than 1 in 10 doses)	Common 1%-10% (1 in 100 to 1 in 10 doses)	Uncommon 1% (1 in 100 doses)	Rare
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pain at the injection site • headache • feeling tired • muscle or joint pain • fever or chills • swelling or tenderness under the armpit (only in Moderna vaccine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • redness & swelling at the injection site • nausea & vomiting (only in Moderna vaccine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enlarged lymph nodes (only in Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • serious allergic reactions such as anaphylaxis

In rare cases, serious allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) can occur. Allergic reactions can be treated and are usually temporary. Seek medical attention if you have trouble breathing, have hives, or swelling of the face and throat. Health Canada continues to monitor vaccine side effects as people receive the vaccine. If you get a reaction to the vaccine, contact your health care provider who will report the side effect directly to public health. Public health will keep track of the reported side effects to make sure the vaccine continues to be safe.

It can take the body a few weeks to build immunity after receiving a vaccine. It is possible that someone could become infected with the COVID-19 virus before or just after getting the vaccine and get sick. This can happen because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection to the body.

It is important **that you continue to follow public health measures** such as physical distancing, wearing a mask, and staying home if you are sick. Health care and other staff must still wear personal protective equipment (PPE) even after they have been vaccinated.

It is recommended that those who have previously tested positive for COVID-19 should still be vaccinated to protect themselves and others.

Precautions

- Delay vaccination if you have a fever, are sick with COVID-19 symptoms, or have received a vaccine in the past 14 days.
- Avoid trying to get pregnant for at least one month after getting both doses of the vaccine.
- If you are on blood thinner medication, they will use a smaller needle and you will need to apply pressure for longer after getting the vaccine to reduce bruising.
- Talk to your health care provider BEFORE vaccination if you:
 - are under 16 years of age (between 12 to 15 years, the Pfizer vaccine may be offered);
 - are pregnant, trying to get pregnant, or breastfeeding/chestfeeding; or
 - have a weakened immune system due to illness or treatment, or a bleeding disorder.

For more information, talk to your health care provider, or visit halton.ca/COVID19.

Do not get this vaccine if you:

- have allergies to any vaccine ingredients, including polyethylene glycol (PEG); or
- have had a severe reaction (anaphylactic) to a previous dose of this vaccine.

Resources

Ministry of Health. COVID-19 Pfizer and Moderna About Vaccines V2. Dec 2020. Available at: http://health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/COVID-19_information_sheet_pfizer-biontech.pdf

National Advisory Committee on Immunization. Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 Vaccines. Dec 2020. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines.html>



Adapted with permission from Toronto Public Health.