

# COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ

## Who is being served by this vaccination program?

Under B.C.'s COVID-19 Immunization Plan, vaccine is being provided for frontline and essential workers, especially in industries where full use of personal protective equipment and barriers can be challenging, where outbreaks and clusters have occurred or are ongoing, and where workers live or work in congregate settings.

## Which vaccine will I be receiving?

At these clinics, frontline and essential workers will receive one of the vaccines approved for all adults 18 and over: Pfizer or Moderna. We encourage you to accept the vaccine you are offered, as all of vaccines available for use in Canada are safe, effective, and will save lives.

## How will I know when it is my turn to get the vaccine?

Vaccine is being administered through a phased approach developed by the Ministry of Health, starting with priority groups first. Sequencing of these groups is based on recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and on our own epidemiological data to reduce the risk of infection to those most vulnerable to severe disease and death following COVID-19 infection, and to protect our health care system. For more information on the provincial immunization plan and priority groups, visit the [BC government website](#). For frontline and essential workers, appointment information will be communicated clearly and directly to each sector and employer.

## Can I get my second dose of vaccine at this time?

At this time, second doses are being offered **16 weeks** from the first dose based on provincial and national [recommendations](#). Data from jurisdictions around the world shows one dose of vaccine provides a high level of protection. Once every eligible person in B.C. has been offered vaccine, the interval between doses may be shortened. If you have already received your first dose, we will be providing information soon about how to register for your second. Please retain your paper record of immunization to bring back to the clinic when it time for their second dose.

## Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure. Canada has a very thorough system to approve new vaccines for human use. Only vaccines that have been shown to be safe are approved. Once approved for use, all vaccines are closely monitored by public health officials and Health Canada for their safety. The COVID-19 vaccines currently used in Canada have been administered to millions of people around the world and have been shown to be both safe and effective.

## How do the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work?

The vaccine enables our body to produce protection (such as antibodies) against the COVID-19 virus. This immune response protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use a new method (messenger RNA – mRNA, the genetic code for a capsule protein of the virus) to help our bodies make this protection.

## Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

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

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you are vaccinated. It takes two to three weeks to gain protection from the COVID-19 vaccine. This means if you contracted the virus before getting the vaccine, or within the two-week period following vaccination, you may still get sick from COVID-19. If you experience symptoms of COVID-19 after you've been vaccinated, use [B.C. self-assessment tool](#) to determine if you need to be tested.

## **Are there side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Serious side effects due to the vaccines were not seen in the clinical trials. The people who received the vaccines in the clinical trials continue to be monitored for any longer-term side effects. A number of processes are in place in Canada to monitor the safety of the vaccines as more people get immunized.

Common reactions to the vaccines may include soreness, redness, swelling and itchiness where the vaccine was given. For some people, these reactions may show up eight or more days after getting the vaccine. Other reactions may include tiredness, headache, fever, chills, muscle or joint soreness, swollen lymph nodes under the armpit, nausea and vomiting. These reactions are mild and generally last one to two days. If you have concerns about any symptoms you develop after receiving the vaccine, speak with your health-care provider or call 8-1-1 for advice.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because about 1 in a million people can have a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. Should this reaction occur, the health-care providers on site are prepared to treat it. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number. Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health-care provider.

## **What is the rate of side effects, and should we consider scheduling changes to accommodate a percentage of people who will need time off to recover?**

Most people experience mild side effects, such as a sore arm, that would not typically interrupt work. We have vaccinated all the staff at a variety of workplaces and have not seen a situation where a large percentage needed time off to recover from vaccination.

## **Who should not get the vaccine?**

You should not get the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine if you have a serious allergy (anaphylaxis) to:

- Those who have a serious allergy to polyethylene glycol (PEG)
- A previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine or to any part of the vaccine

Tell your health-care provider if you have had anaphylaxis but no cause was found after seeing an allergy specialist, or if you had anaphylaxis before and did not get seen by an allergy specialist.

## **Are there additional considerations to getting the vaccine?**

Speak with your health care provider if you:

- Have an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment;
- Have an autoimmune condition;
- Are pregnant, may be pregnant or are planning to become pregnant;
- Are breastfeeding;

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- Have received a monoclonal antibody or convalescent plasma for treatment or prevention of COVID-19;
- Have received a vaccine in the last 14 days; or
- Have symptoms of COVID-19.

## **I already had COVID-19. Do I still need the shot?**

If you had, or may have had, COVID-19 you should still get the vaccine. This is because you may not be immune to the virus that causes COVID-19 and could get infected and sick again.

## **How are the vaccines given?**

The vaccines are given by injection as a series of two doses. It is important to get both doses of the vaccine for full protection. Second doses will be offered 16 weeks from the first dose based on provincial and national [recommendations](#). Data from jurisdictions around the world shows one dose of vaccine provides a high level of protection. When it's time to receive your second dose, you will be invited to receive it as you were for your first. Please retain your paper record of immunization to bring back to the clinic with you at that time.

## **What if I choose not to get vaccinated?**

Getting the vaccine is not mandatory, and whether you choose to get the vaccine will not affect your access to health care services, nor employment or housing status. However, we encourage everyone who can do so to get the vaccine, as it will help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save lives by preventing disease, especially for people most likely to have severe illness or die. If enough people get vaccinated, it makes it difficult for the disease to spread. We hope that as more Canadians get vaccinated, we can return to activities that haven't been possible during the pandemic.

## **As an employer, am I able to get a list of my employees who attended a vaccination clinic?**

Patient privacy is protected under the provincial Health Act, so we are not able to share a list of who attended each clinic.

## **Do I need to continue wearing a mask and follow social distancing measures after I receive my vaccine?**

Yes, public health orders, restrictions and guidelines remain in place for everyone, regardless if you have received the vaccine. Provincial guidelines on what those who have been vaccinated can and cannot do are current in development. At this time, it will still be important to wash your hands, adhere to physical distancing guidelines, wear a mask, and stay home when sick, even after receiving the vaccine.

Data is still being gathered around the world about how long the protection lasts from COVID-19 vaccines or how well they work in preventing asymptomatic infection or reducing transmission of the virus. This means that all current enhanced safety measures and COVID-19 protocols will stay in place until a significant percentage of the population has been vaccinated for COVID-19 or until it is deemed safe to relax those rules.

## **Can I travel once I received the vaccine?**

Federal and provincial health orders and guidelines remain in place for everyone, even if you have received the vaccine. Learn more about [province-wide](#) and [federal restrictions](#).

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**If I am eligible to be vaccinated but I am not a resident of B.C., can I still be vaccinated?**

Yes, everyone living in B.C. will have the opportunity to be immunized, as long as the vaccine is recommended for them. That means that groups such as temporary foreign workers, international students, people who are not permanent residents of Canada, and people who recently moved to B.C. will be able to get the COVID-19 vaccine.