

COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ's ¹²³

1. How does the COVID-19 vaccine work?

All vaccines work by presenting your body with something that looks like an infection so your immune system can learn how to produce natural protection. The two COVID-19 vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna) use a method called messenger mRNA (mRNA). The mRNA is like a code that tells cells in your body how to make a piece of the outer lining of the virus, for a short time. This piece of virus, or protein, cannot hurt you, but it is enough for your immune system to learn how to fight off COVID-19.

2. Is the vaccine safe?

Yes, the two vaccines are considered very safe and have been approved for use in Canada based on rigorous research and testing. Research into mRNA vaccine technology began in the early 1990s, so the science is not new. More than 70,000 people were involved in these vaccine trials, and, as of January, 15 million people have been vaccinated worldwide. Serious safety concerns may occur extremely rarely (eg anaphylactic reactions).

3. Is the vaccine effective?

Yes. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have a 94-95% effectiveness rate.

4. What are the side effects?

As with other vaccines, some people can develop mild-moderate side effects that typically resolve in a few days. Common side effects include pain at the injection site, headache, muscle pain, fever, swelling-these are more likely to occur after your second dose. In very rare cases, serious allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) can occur.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021, January 21)
COVID-19 Vaccine: Helps protect you from getting COVID-19.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>

² Ontario Ministry of Health (2021, January 7)
Information Sheet Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 Vaccines
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/COVID-19_information_sheet_pfizer-biontech.pdf

Tanula, M. (2020, December 9). *COVID-19 Vaccine Myths Debunked*. Mayo Clinic News Network. <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/covid-19-vaccine-myths-debunked/>

5. When will I get the vaccine?

The Canadian government's goal is to vaccinate every eligible person by the end of 2021. You can visit the [Government of Ontario's COVID-19 Vaccine page](#) for updates.

6. Should I get the vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

Pregnant and breastfeeding women were not included in COVID-19 vaccination trials. However, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada have stated that the risk COVID-19 health complications during pregnancy outweighs any possible un-described risks of being vaccinated during pregnancy or while breastfeeding, and that vaccination should be offered.⁴ Pregnant women should discuss risks and benefits with their family physician or primary healthcare provider before making a decision.

7. Should I get the vaccine if I have a history of allergies or am immunosuppressed?

People who have ever had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of a vaccine should NOT receive it.

If you are immunosuppressed due to a condition or treatment, discuss the benefits and risks of vaccination with your physician. Although people with a decrease in their immune system were not included in the available vaccine trials, it is considered to be safe and recommended. Only vaccines with any live virus are NOT safe for immunosuppressed people. The COVID vaccine does not contain any live virus and there is no risk of getting an infection with the vaccine.