

# **Questions about COVID-19 vaccines?**

**Here are some  
answers.**



## What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a coronavirus that was first identified in late 2019. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause mild to severe respiratory infections. Novel (new) coronaviruses include COVID-19.

## How is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is most commonly spread through respiratory droplets of someone who is infected with the virus. This can be through coughing, sneezing, talking, breathing and singing. COVID-19 can also be spread by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands. The virus can be spread before you start showing or developing symptoms.

## Who is eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine?

Ontarians aged five and over can get the first and second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Booster doses are also available to those aged 12 and over.

Certain individuals are eligible and recommended to receive a third dose as part of an extended primary series and booster dose(s) of the COVID-19 vaccine, due to potential waning of immunity based on their increased risk of severe illness and hospitalization.

For information on eligibility, visit [ontario.ca/covidvaccineinfo](https://ontario.ca/covidvaccineinfo).

## Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Getting vaccinated is the most important thing you can do to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community from severe illness and hospitalization due to COVID-19 and its variants.

COVID-19 vaccines do not cause a coronavirus infection. They help build up immunity to the virus, so that your body will fight it off more easily. This can reduce

your risk of getting COVID-19 or make the symptoms milder if you do get it.

## Why should I get vaccinated when public health measures are being lifted?

The lifting of public health and workplace safety measures does not signal that COVID-19 has disappeared or that the pandemic is over. Vaccination continues to be the best protection against COVID-19 and helps protect the progress we have made.

Receiving all recommended doses of COVID-19 vaccines remains the most important thing you can do to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community from COVID-19 and its variants. It substantially reduces your risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death.

## Is a COVID-19 booster dose necessary?

While a primary series of the COVID-19 vaccine is highly effective against serious illness and hospitalization, it is important that you stay up-to-date by receiving all recommended doses of COVID-19 vaccine, as protection after a primary COVID-19 vaccine series does decrease over time, especially against variants of concern.

Individuals aged 18 and over can schedule a first booster dose appointment three months (84 days) after their second dose. Those aged 12 to 17 can schedule a first booster dose six months (168 days) after the second dose. In addition, certain individuals are eligible for a second booster dose.

For more information, please visit [ontario.ca/covidvaccineinfo](https://ontario.ca/covidvaccineinfo).

## I've already had COVID-19 and recovered. Do I still need to get the vaccine?

Yes, you should still get all recommended doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to increase protection against severe illness and hospitalization.

Even if you've recovered from COVID-19, you are not immune and can still get the virus and be contagious while not showing any symptoms. With the spread of new variants, it is important that you stay up-to-date with your COVID-19 vaccines.

If you have had COVID-19 recently, it may be best to wait to get your next dose for up to six months after having COVID-19. Speak with a health care provider for more information on optimal timing based on your age, the number of doses you have received, and your health status.

### **Will I experience side effects?**

Like any vaccination, some people may experience mild side effects and reactions that will subside anywhere from a few hours to a few days after vaccination. These side effects are a part of the body's efforts to build immunity to COVID-19 following vaccination. The most common side effects include colour changes (for example, red or purple), as well as soreness or swelling on the arm where you got your shot, tiredness, headache, muscle and joint pain, chills or mild fever.

If you develop side effects that worry you or do not seem to be going away after a few days, please contact your health care provider.

### **Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?**

Yes. Health Canada has one of the most rigorous scientific review systems in the world and only approves a vaccine if it is safe, works, and meets the highest manufacturing and quality standards.

Only vaccines that Health Canada has approved are administered in Ontario.

Learn more about the vaccines from [Health Canada's website](#).

### **Should I be worried about vaccines that were developed so quickly?**

No. Only vaccines that Health Canada has approved and determined as safe and effective will be administered in Ontario.

These vaccines were developed faster than other vaccines because of the never-before-seen levels of collaboration and funding invested in this effort around the world.

Researchers have also been studying and working with [mRNA vaccines](#) for more than 10 years, which is why the mRNA technology was able to be utilized quickly to develop the COVID-19 vaccine.

While COVID-19 vaccines were developed rapidly, all steps were taken to make sure they are safe and effective.

### **What was the approval process for the vaccine?**

Tremendous resources around the world were put towards developing COVID-19 vaccines, which helped to advance the vaccine approval process efficiently and effectively. This includes adaptation of existing research programs, international collaboration among scientists and governments, increased dedicated funding, quick recruitment of clinical trial participants, and rapid set-up of clinical trials to demonstrate the effectiveness of the vaccine. Canada's best independent scientists thoroughly reviewed all the data before approving the vaccines as safe and effective for Canadians. All safety steps were followed in approving these vaccines.

Learn more about the review and authorization process from [Health Canada's website](#).

### **What are the longer-term side effects of this vaccine?**

Ongoing studies of longer-term side effects of the vaccines indicate no serious side effects found to date. People who have received the vaccine in studies continue to be monitored for any longer-term side effects.

For more information on adverse events following immunization (AEFIs) or to report an AEFI, visit [Public Health Ontario's vaccine safety web page](#).

### **Are the side effects from the second dose or booster doses worse than the first?**

Some people may experience stronger side effects after their second dose of the vaccine. Since side effects are the result of your immune system building protection, once your immune system has been primed with the first dose, there is a much stronger immune response to the second dose. This is a good thing and indicates that the vaccine is doing its job!

Side effects after getting booster doses are similar to those after the first and second doses. Common side effects can last a few hours or a couple of days after vaccination and may include colour changes (for example, red or purple), as well as soreness or swelling on the arm where you got your shot, tiredness, headache, muscle and joint pain, chills or mild fever.

### **Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?**

No, you cannot get COVID-19 or any other infectious disease from the vaccine. None of the Health Canada approved vaccines are live vaccines, meaning that they do not contain the virus that causes COVID-19.

### **Can I still contract COVID-19 after getting vaccinated?**

The vaccine reduces the risk of contracting COVID-19, but as with other immunizations, you can't fully eliminate the risk of infection,

especially with ongoing community transmission of this virus.

Getting vaccinated substantially reduces your risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death, and is the best way to protect yourself and those around you from serious illness due to COVID-19.

### **Will the COVID-19 vaccine affect my fertility? What if I'm pregnant now?**

There is currently no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility.

In fact, getting all the recommended doses of the COVID-19 vaccine before you conceive or while you're pregnant will protect you and your future baby from the risk of COVID-19 in pregnancy.

### **Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for those who are pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to conceive?**

Yes. You can safely get the COVID-19 vaccine before becoming pregnant or in any trimester of pregnancy. Getting the COVID-19 vaccine while you're pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to conceive is safe, effective and highly recommended by the Provincial Council for Maternal and Child Health (PCMCH), Ontario Society of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists (OSOG), Society of Obstetricians, Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC), National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and many other national and international organizations.

The benefits of getting vaccinated to prevent potential complications in pregnancy far outweigh the risks. If you get COVID-19 while you are pregnant, you have a greater risk of hospitalization, intensive care unit admission and life support compared to COVID-19 positive people who are not pregnant.

Not only will the vaccine protect you from COVID-19 infection, but it will also reduce the risk of severe illness and complications

related to COVID-19 infections in pregnancy. Studies suggest the antibodies your body develops following vaccination will pass to your baby through the placenta and/or your breastmilk, which may provide not only yourself, but also your child, with greater protection against COVID-19 after birth. For more information, visit [ontario.ca/covidvaccinepregnancy](https://ontario.ca/covidvaccinepregnancy).

### **Why should my child get vaccinated? Isn't COVID-19 milder for children?**

While children who get infected with COVID-19 typically experience mild symptoms, some can get very sick, resulting in hospitalization, ICU admission or even death. Others can experience serious and longer-lasting symptoms (i.e., long COVID-19, post-acute COVID-19 syndrome). This is especially true for children who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions.

Vaccinating children and youth will provide them with a strong level of protection against serious illness, hospitalization and death from the virus. Vaccination helps protect other family members too, such as those who can't get vaccinated yet, or more vulnerable elderly individuals.

Health Canada has authorized the Pfizer vaccine for use in children aged five and over and the Moderna vaccine for use in children aged six and over.

Children aged five and over are recommended to receive the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. With informed consent, which should include awareness of possible elevated risk of myocarditis/pericarditis, children aged six and over may receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

Millions of children in Canada and the US have received the COVID-19 vaccine and overall, no concerning safety signals were observed.

As with vaccines for other diseases, your child is protected best when they [stay up-to-date](#).

For more information, visit [ontario.ca/covidvaccinekids](https://ontario.ca/covidvaccinekids).

### **Is there a microchip in the vaccine?**

No.

### **How is the COVID-19 vaccine different from the flu vaccine?**

The COVID-19 vaccine and the flu vaccine are very different and cannot be directly compared. They target different viruses; the flu vaccine targets several strains of the influenza viruses at once, while the COVID-19 vaccine targets just one virus, SARS-CoV-2.

It is important to receive both the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine as they protect against different viruses. It is safe to get your flu shot or a different vaccine at the same time as your COVID-19 vaccine. A 14-day wait period before or after your COVID-19 vaccine is not required.

### **Am I eligible for a vaccine if I don't have an Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) card?**

Anyone who lives, studies, or works in Ontario or who visits Ontario is eligible to receive the vaccine at no cost, regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

You do not need an Ontario health card to receive the vaccine. You may use another form of photo identification document (ID) to support your name and date of birth, or a combination of IDs, such as a driver's license, passport, a piece of registered mail, pay stub, student card, government issued identification from other jurisdictions. These can include foreign and expired government documents.

If you do not have a health card and your public health unit uses the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre (PVCC), you can call the PVCC at 1-833-943-3900 to book your appointment. You will be asked to provide a form of photo identification at the vaccine appointment.

You can also contact your local public health unit to confirm your eligibility for vaccination and help you book an appointment. To find a local public health unit and contact number, visit [ontario.ca/publichealth](http://ontario.ca/publichealth).

### **Will donating blood reduce the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine?**

No, there is no suggestion or evidence in the research available that donating blood will reduce the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Donating does not remove the vaccine from the body and won't deplete the body of important immune fighting cells and antibodies that are formed in response to the vaccine. For more information, please visit [Canadian Blood Services](http://CanadianBloodServices.ca).

### **What if I'm behind on my regular immunization schedule? Can I still get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Yes. We also encourage those who are behind on their immunizations to contact their health care provider to get up-to-date.

### **What resources are available to those with a disability or accessibility concerns?**

Vaccination sites are required to provide accessible customer service and to communicate with people with disabilities in an accessible manner. In addition, the following resources are available:

- [ConnectABILITY.ca](http://ConnectABILITY.ca) for information about COVID-19 vaccines, resources

and supports for caregivers, videos from trusted sources, and more.

- The [Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities](http://HealthCareAccessResearchandDevelopmentalDisabilities.ca) website and [vaccinesupport.ca](http://vaccinesupport.ca) for information about getting your child/dependent with a developmental or intellectual disability vaccinated (accommodations at the vaccine site, home visit options, fear of needles etc.).
- Ontario Community Support Association ([www.ontariocommunitysupport.ca](http://www.ontariocommunitysupport.ca)) for information about the Accessible Drive-to-Vaccines program that provides door-to-door rides to vaccination sites for people with disabilities, including seniors with mobility issues, who face challenges accessing safe transportation.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Visit [Ontario.ca/covidvaccine](http://Ontario.ca/covidvaccine) to learn more about COVID-19 vaccines for Ontario, including vaccine information and eligibility, how to book an appointment, what to expect, and more. You can also contact the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre to speak to an experienced agent or health specialist at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY for people who are deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired: 1-866-797-0007), available in more than 300 languages, seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

For questions about COVID-19 vaccines for children, youth and those who are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning to conceive, contact the SickKids COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service to book a confidential phone appointment with a SickKids paediatric Registered Nurse through [sickkids.ca/vaccineconsult](http://sickkids.ca/vaccineconsult) or 1-888-304-6558. This service is also available in multiple languages using over-the-phone language interpretation.

Or, call the Scarborough Health Network (SHN) VaxFacts Clinic for a one-to-one phone consultation with a qualified SHN doctor to get the facts you need to make an informed decision about COVID-19 vaccines. Book an appointment through [shn.ca/vaxfacts](https://shn.ca/vaxfacts) or call 416-438-2911, ext. 5738. Appointments are available seven days a week, from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. in over 200 languages.

