

# COVID-19 Vaccines

## Facts regarding vaccines developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna

### COVID-19

COVID-19 is a viral infection that primarily affects the lungs. Some people may have a mild illness. Others may get very sick, including seniors or people with a pre-existing health condition. Very rarely, some children can get a serious inflammatory condition. 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 or living conditions.

### How these vaccines work

The vaccine tells the cells in our body to make a protein that is found specifically on the virus that causes COVID-19. These “spike proteins,” although harmless to us, will trigger our body to start making antibodies. Our new antibodies will protect us from being sick if we are exposed to the virus. The vaccine does not contain the virus and so it cannot give us COVID-19.

Both vaccines have been tested in large clinical trials to ensure they meet safety standards, and both have been licensed and approved by Health Canada.

### Vaccination process

Both vaccines require two doses. The Pfizer doses are given at least 21 days apart for people 16 years of age and older, including seniors. The Moderna doses are given at least 28 days apart for people 18 years of age and older, including seniors.

### 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 with this vaccine. In trials, the vaccine was 95% effective.

There is a small chance that you may still get COVID-19 after being vaccinated. It is important to continue with 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.

### Side effects and risks

Some people may experience side effects from the vaccine, but they will likely be moderate and resolve after a few days. Some of the symptoms are part of the body's response to developing immunity.

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. Vaccine side effects will continue to be monitored 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.

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## Common side effects

Common side effects that have been reported in the clinical trials for this vaccine include:

Very Common [ $\geq 10\%$  – more than 1 in 10 doses]

- » 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]

Common [1%-10% – 1 in 100 to 1 in 10 doses]

- » redness and swelling at the injection site
- » nausea and vomiting [only in Moderna vaccine]

Uncommon [1% – 1 in 100 doses]

- » enlarged lymph nodes

Very Rare

- » serious allergic reactions such as anaphylaxis

## 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 a 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.

## Do not get this vaccine if you:

- ▶ have allergies to any vaccine ingredients, including polyethylene glycol
- ▶ have had a severe reaction to a previous dose of this vaccine.

## Talk to your health care provider first if you:

- ▶ are under 16 years of age [between 12 to 15 years, the Pfizer vaccine may be offered]
- ▶ are pregnant or breastfeeding
- ▶ have a weakened immune system due to illness or treatment, or a bleeding disorder

## Additional up-to-date vaccine information is available

National Advisory Committee on Immunization. Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 Vaccines [December 2020]

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines.html>