

COVID-19 VACCINE

Frequently asked questions

FAQ

How were the COVID-19 vaccines developed? Were they rushed?

- When the COVID-19 virus was first found, many scientists around the world started working to make vaccines to fight it. It usually takes a long time to develop a vaccine. This time everyone worked together to make sure there was enough money, people and the right tools to allow many of the steps of making the vaccine to happen at the same time. Safety was checked at every step along the way.
- Every year scientists create a safe, new vaccine for the seasonal flu.
- Feeling worried or unsure is common when something is new. However, Health Canada has a careful approval process that makes sure all of the vaccines and medicines we take are safe.
- All four vaccines that are available right now in Canada were tested on thousands of people to make sure they are safe and effective.

Is there more than one COVID-19 vaccine?

- There are many vaccines being developed around the world. Right now, four vaccines have been approved in Canada: The Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines. The vaccines may have been developed and work in slightly different ways, but all of them will protect you from death and hospitalization due to COVID-19.

What is the difference between the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines?

Vaccine name	Pfizer-BioNTech	Moderna	AstraZeneca	Johnson & Johnson
Type of vaccine	mRNA	mRNA	Adenovirus-based	Adenovirus-based
Age eligibility	16 and older	18 and older	18 and older	18 and older
Doses required	2 doses	2 doses	2 doses	1 dose

What is an mRNA vaccine?

- The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna are mRNA vaccines.
- Research on mRNA is not new. It has been researched for decades.
- mRNA gives your cells the recipe to make antibodies that fight off the COVID-19 virus.
- Scientists identified the “spike protein” found on the COVID-19 virus. Then they made the mRNA vaccine to tell your body how to build that spike protein.
- When you get the vaccine, it instructs your cells to make the harmless spike protein. Your immune system will then build antibodies to fight it off. If you come into contact with the COVID-19 virus, your body will know how to fight it off. This is why you might have muscle soreness, fever and other mild side effects right after receiving the vaccine.
- Now your immune system will remember the virus. If you come into contact with the COVID-19 virus, your body will recognize it and know how to fight it off without making you sick.
- The vaccine does not give you COVID-19.

What is an adenovirus-based vaccine?

- AstraZeneca and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) are adenovirus-based vaccines.
- Adenoviruses are common viruses that can cause cold-like symptoms.
- Adenoviruses-based vaccines have been studied for decades. They are used to deliver genes (DNA) of other viruses and instruct your body’s cells to make antibodies, but they do not cause the disease.
- For the COVID-19 vaccine, researchers swapped in a gene from the COVID-19 virus.
- The adenovirus vaccine makes the harmless COVID-19 virus spike protein, which tells your body’s immune system to make antibodies to fight off the virus.
- This is why you might have muscle soreness, fever and other mild side effects soon after receiving the vaccine.
- Now your immune system remembers the COVID-19 virus. If you contract COVID-19, your immune system will know the virus and fight it off without making you sick.
- The vaccine does not give you COVID-19.

Are vaccines with a higher efficacy rate better than vaccines with a lower efficacy rate?

- Vaccine efficacy is a term used in clinical studies. It refers to the drop in COVID-19 cases in people who got vaccinated (treatment group) compared with people who did not get vaccinated (placebo group), under controlled conditions.
- Effectiveness is different from efficacy—effectiveness is how well a vaccine works in the real world, not in a clinical trial.
- All four vaccines have high efficacy in preventing hospitalization and death due to COVID-19.

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- All four vaccines protect you from severe symptoms, hospitalization and death due to COVID-19.
- You should not worry about the different efficacies because studies show that everyone who has been vaccinated is protected from the worst symptoms of COVID-19.

If I got the flu shot, can I still get a COVID-19 vaccine?

- Yes, you can get a COVID-19 vaccine even if you got the flu shot. Having both will not cause any problems. The flu shot protects you from the flu virus, which is a different type of virus than COVID-19. However, if you have had the flu shot or any other vaccines recently, you need to wait at least 14 days (2 weeks) before getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

Will the vaccines increase my immunity to COVID-19? Can I still spread it to other people?

- The vaccines will build up your immunity to the COVID-19 virus.
- Scientists and doctors are still watching and testing to see if people who have had the COVID-19 vaccine can still spread the virus to others.

Can I get any of the vaccines if I don't have a health card or other government ID?

- Yes, everyone can get the vaccine (when available) with or without a health card or other ID.

Should people who are immuno-compromised get a COVID-19 vaccine?

- People who are immuno-compromised are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19.
- Due to the high risk of severe COVID-19 in people who are immune-compromised, they can get the COVID-19 vaccine if there are no contraindications.
- There is still limited evidence on this population, but researchers are trying to see if immune-compromised people will respond to the vaccine in the same way as other people do.
- It is important to talk to your health care team and discuss your case before getting the vaccine.

How long will the COVID-19 vaccine protect me from the virus?

- It is too early to know how long the COVID-19 vaccines will protect you from COVID-19 and whether you will need booster shots. More research is needed to answer this question.
- Research shows that people who have recovered from COVID-19 are less likely to get reinfected for at least some period of time.

Will I get the vaccine yearly?

- The COVID-19 vaccine is new, so it is still not known if people will need to get the vaccine every year. More research is needed to decide that.

Is the vaccine effective against the COVID-19 mutations?

- Scientists are still learning whether the vaccines are effective against the COVID-19 mutations. So far, they have been proven to be effective, which looks promising for the most common COVID-19 variants.
- It is important for more people to get vaccinated to stop the spread of the virus because the spread can lead to an increase in new mutations.

What are common myths about the COVID vaccines?

Claim	One of the COVID-19 vaccines has microchip tracking or “nanotransducers.”
Fact	There is no microchip vaccine and the vaccine will not track people or gather personal information.
Claim	The COVID-19 vaccine has mercury as an ingredient.
Fact	Mercury is not an ingredient in the COVID-19 vaccines that are approved. You can also check the Ontario Government “COVID-19 Vaccine Safety” website for the vaccines’ ingredients: covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccine-safety#vaccine-ingredients-and-how-they-work
Claim	The COVID-19 vaccine will change my DNA.
Fact	The vaccine will only build up immunity and tell your body how to build antibodies. It will not interact with or change your DNA.
Claim	The COVID-19 vaccine can cause mental or neurological (brain) illnesses.
Fact	There is no evidence that vaccines cause any mental or neurological illnesses.
Claim	The COVID-19 vaccine causes infertility and miscarriages.
Fact	There is no link between the COVID-19 vaccine and infertility or miscarriage.

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Claim	You don't need to wear a mask after you get the COVID-19 vaccine.
Fact	It will take time for everyone to get vaccinated. Until most people are vaccinated, the COVID-19 virus can still be passed around. Even after you get the vaccine, you need to follow public health guidelines (for example, physical distancing, wearing a mask, washing your hands).
Claim	You can just wait until there is herd immunity.
Fact	Both COVID-19 and the vaccines are new. We don't know how long protection lasts for people who get infected or people who are vaccinated. But we do know that COVID-19 has caused very serious illness and death for many, many people. If you get COVID-19, you also risk giving it to your loved ones, who may get very sick. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine is the safest choice.
Claim	The vaccine is a cure for COVID-19.
Fact	The vaccine is a preventative measure, not a cure for COVID-19. Getting the vaccine will most likely reduce your risk of getting sick from COVID-19.
Claim	The vaccine will cause Bell's palsy.
Fact	People who have had Bell's palsy can get the vaccine. The reported cases of Bell's palsy were found not to be related to the COVID-19 vaccines.
Claim	Some vaccines are less effective than others.
Fact	Although some of the vaccines have been shown to be more effective in preventing people from getting the COVID-19 virus in general, all of the approved vaccines are 100% effective in preventing death and hospitalization due to COVID-19. That means the vaccine will protect you from the worst COVID-19 symptoms.

This FAQ will be updated as new questions arise. Please check back frequently.

Notes

If you have questions, please talk to your doctor.

This information sheet is not intended to be a resource for people who require screening for COVID-19 or who are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911 immediately or go to your nearest emergency department.

For more information, visit www.camh.ca/covidvaccine

Adapted with permission from CAMH's Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre