SARS-CoV-2 Vaccines (COVID-19)

What is COVID-19?
COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). COVID-19 was recognized for the first time in December 2019 and has since spread around the world to cause a pandemic. The virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly passed from an infected person to others when the infected person coughs, sneezes, sings, talks or breathes. It is important to note that infected people can spread the infection even if they have no symptoms.

Symptoms of COVID-19 can vary from person to person, in different age groups and depending on the COVID-19 variant. Some people infected with the virus have no symptoms at all, while others have symptoms that range from mild to severe. Even people with mild symptoms may feel unwell for a long time after a COVID-19 infection. The most commonly reported symptoms can include any of the following: new or worsening cough; sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath or trouble breathing; fever; headache; fatigue; muscle or body aches; diarrhea; loss of smell or taste; headache.

Unvaccinated people are at much higher risk of COVID-19 infection and serious illness, including hospitalization and death, compared to vaccinated people.

What are COVID-19 Vaccines and what are their benefits?
COVID-19 vaccines protect against the SARS-CoV-2 virus (also known as COVID-19). Vaccines work with your immune system, so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to protect our families, communities and ourselves against COVID-19. Evidence indicates that the vaccines used in Canada are very effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19.

The following COVID-19 vaccines are approved for use in Canada:
- mRNA vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty®) and Moderna (SpikeVax®)
- viral vector-based vaccines: AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria)/COVISHIELD and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson)
- protein-based vaccine: Novavax (Nuvaxovid)
- plant-based vaccine: Medicago (Covifenz®)

How is the vaccine given?
The vaccine is given as an injection into the upper arm in older children and adults; and into the thigh in infants.

Who should get a COVID-19 vaccine?
- Everyone is at risk of COVID-19. You should get a COVID-19 vaccine if you are aged 6 months and older.
- To find out which vaccine is right for you, follow the instructions of your health care provider, local pharmacy or Public Health office to ensure you receive the best protection for your age and health circumstances.

When starting a primary series, which COVID-19 vaccine product is recommended for me?
- mRNA vaccines are the recommended choice for all COVID-19 vaccines.
- Some mRNA vaccines products are preferred over other mRNA products depending on your age.
  - When starting a primary vaccine series at **6 months to 4 years and 11 months old**, the Moderna Spikevax mRNA vaccine (infant dose) is authorized for this age group.
  - When starting a primary vaccine series between **5 and 11 years old**, the Pfizer Comirnaty mRNA vaccine (pediatric dose) is preferred.
When starting a primary vaccine series between 12 and 29 years old, the Pfizer Comirnaty mRNA vaccine (adult dose) is preferred.

When starting a primary vaccine series at 30 years and older, either the Pfizer Comirnaty or the Moderna Spikevax mRNA vaccine (adult dose) is preferred.

- Individuals who are not able to receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, may be offered other COVID-19 vaccine products.
- Consult with your health care provider, local pharmacy or Public Health office to discuss which mRNA vaccine product is best for you.

**Should you get a COVID-19 vaccine after having a COVID-19 infection?**

**Yes. Vaccination after a COVID infection is important.** The combination of having been infected and also being vaccinated (called hybrid immunity) does provide a strong protection against new variants. Individuals who have been infected with COVID can optimize their benefit of a strong immune response by timing and spacing their next vaccine dose since the time of infection.

Recommended intervals between your infection and your next vaccine dose can be found on [COVID-19 vaccines (gnb.ca)](https://www.gnb.ca/en/health_care/covid19/vaccines).

**What are the possible side effects of the vaccine?**

Side effects can develop in the few days after receiving the vaccines. Although most side effects are not serious to your health, they may make you feel unwell for a few days; they will go away on their own. Some more common and expected side effects include one or more of the following: pain, redness or swelling where the needle was given, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, chills, fever.

It is important to note that you cannot get COVID-19 infection from the vaccine.

**What can be done for common side effects to the vaccine?**

- Applying a cold compress at the injection site may reduce discomfort.
- For discomfort and fever, you can take or give your child medicine by following the manufacturer’s instructions. Ask your healthcare provider what medicine is best.

**Are there any serious side effects to the vaccines?**

COVID-19 vaccines are tested during their development according to international standards and then carefully reviewed by Health Canada. Only vaccines that meet the safety, effectiveness and quality standards of Health Canada are approved for use. After they are approved, vaccines continue to be closely monitored to help ensure their safe use. As with all vaccines, rare reactions may still occur. The benefits of all COVID-19 vaccines continue to outweigh the risks of the disease.

Rarely, allergic reactions can occur after receiving a vaccine. Symptoms of an allergic reaction include hives (bumps on the skin that are often very itchy), swelling of your face, tongue or throat, or difficulty breathing. The clinic staff are prepared to manage an allergic reaction should it occur. Seek immediate medical care if you develop any of these symptoms.

Other rare reactions reported after getting a COVID-19 vaccine, by vaccine type:

**mRNA vaccines:**
- Anaphylaxis
- Myocarditis and pericarditis (inflammation of the heart or lining on the outside of the heart)
- Bell’s palsy (facial paralysis)

**Viral vector vaccines:**
- Anaphylaxis
- Vaccine-induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT), also called thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS)
• Capillary leak syndrome (CLS)
• Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS)
• Immune thrombocytopenia (ITP)
• Venous thromboembolism (VTE)

**Protein-based vaccines:**
• Anaphylaxis

**Plant-based vaccines:**
• Anaphylaxis

**Can I receive a COVID-19 vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?**
• Yes. When you are pregnant, you have a higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine lowers your risk of getting seriously ill from the virus.
• If you are pregnant or breastfeeding and have questions about getting a COVID-19 vaccine, talk to your healthcare provider, local pharmacy or Public Health to know which vaccine is best for you.

**I am allergic to a component of the vaccine being offered to me, what should I do?**
• If you are allergic to a component of the COVID-19 vaccine being offered, you will need to consult with your health care provider to determine the most appropriate actions for your situation.

**How many doses of a COVID-19 vaccine do I need?**
• It is recommended that you receive all of the doses that are offered to you, including all of your booster doses and stay up-to-date with your COVID-19 vaccination.
• Depending on the vaccines you received and your health situation, talk to your healthcare provider, local pharmacy or Public Health who can advise you of the number of doses and the appropriate type of COVID-19 vaccine you require for best protection.
• COVID vaccines remain an essential first defense against serious illness and death from the disease.

**What other information do I need and where can I find COVID-19 vaccine resources?**
• Keep your immunization record in a safe place. Register online at MyHealthNB.gnb.ca to obtain a record of your COVID-19 immunizations. The paper record of COVID-19 Immunization provided when vaccinated will continue to be the official record. Keep a copy and take a picture of it. The paper copy or picture of the copy can be used as proof of vaccination.
• You can find COVID-19 vaccine useful resources at these trusted websites:
  o Living with COVID-19 (gnb.ca)
  o Get the facts | COVID-19 vaccines (gnb.ca)
  o Immunize Canada
  o COVID-19 Vaccines: Authorized vaccines – Health Canada
  o Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) – Health Canada

For additional information, contact your family physician, local Public Health office, or Telecare 811.