

FAQ:

COVID-19 vaccines and long-term care homes

What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccine aims to prevent illness and limit transmission of the virus. As of December 9, 2020, the COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer-BioNTech has been approved by Health Canada for use in individuals aged 16 years and older with some exceptions. As of December 23, 2020, the COVID-19 vaccine from Moderna has been approved by Health Canada for use in individuals 18 and older with some exceptions.

What is an mRNA vaccine and how does it work?

In general, messenger ribonucleic acid, or mRNA, tells our cells which proteins to make. The COVID-19 vaccine is an mRNA vaccine and it tells our cells to make proteins that are part of the coronavirus. These proteins are called “spike proteins”. Once made, spike proteins are recognized by our immune system as foreign and our system starts to create antibodies to clear our bodies of this foreign material. The immune system removes the mRNA from the vaccine and destroys the spike proteins with antibodies. Our immune system also remembers this foreign material. This means that if someone receives the COVID-19 vaccine, develops an immune response, and then gets the virus, their immune cells will be able to recognize and destroy the viruses before they can make the person sick.

Can the COVID-19 vaccine cause COVID-19 infection?

No, the COVID-19 vaccine cannot cause a COVID-19 infection. The COVID-19 vaccines currently approved do not use live components of the virus.

How will the COVID-19 vaccine be administered?

Like most vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccine will be administered intramuscularly (into the muscle) to the shoulder. It will be a two-step vaccine, meaning that you will be required to receive two doses a few weeks apart. The current schedule is for 21 days between the two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and 28 days between the two doses of the Moderna vaccine.

What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine and how common is it to experience side effects after being vaccinated?

Like any other vaccine or medication, there are potential side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine. Based on evidence collected in clinical trials, the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines are very similar to those associated with the influenza vaccine. Serious side effects are rare, but not impossible.

For a complete breakdown of side effects and their documented frequency, please review this table:

	Very common and common (1% to 10% of vaccine recipients)	Uncommon and very rare (0.1% to less than 1% of vaccine recipients)
Side effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pain, redness and swelling at the injection site• Headache or feeling tired• Muscle or joint pain• Fever or chills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enlarged lymph nodes• Serious allergic reactions like anaphylaxis

I just got vaccinated for something else. Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine now?

You should wait 14 days before receiving the COVID-19 vaccine if you have had another type of vaccine. After receiving your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, you should not receive any other vaccines for 28 days. If for some reason you need another vaccine within 28 days, discuss this with your doctor or health care provider.

Why should I get vaccinated if COVID-19 has a 99% survival rate?

COVID-19 can be a serious illness for many people, including those who are young and were previously healthy. Symptoms can persist for months, and the virus can damage the heart, brain and lungs. Getting COVID-19 can also increase the risk of long-term health problems.

The potential short-term side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are less of a risk than the long-term health damages that can be caused by a COVID-19 infection.

Why are we, people from long-term care and retirement homes, getting the vaccine first?

The COVID-19 vaccine will be rolled out to identified key groups first. These groups include staff, residents, and essential caregivers in long-term care and retirements homes. As an employee or essential caregiver, you work with some of the most vulnerable people in our community. As you know, many of the residents would be unable to complete their day-to-day activities without your help. By getting the vaccine you will be less likely to get sick with COVID-19. Staying safe and healthy helps keep those you care for safe and healthy too.

If I feel unwell after getting the shot, will I be paid while I cannot go to work?

Yes. If you are unwell after you receive your COVID-19 vaccination and are and unable to work, you will be eligible for paid pandemic leave for the period of illness up to 14 consecutive calendar days. Please consult your Supervisor and Administrator if you need to take pandemic leave.

If you experience mild COVID-19 symptoms after vaccination, follow the instructions from your workplace.

Will staff still be tested weekly for COVID-19 after they receive the second dose of the vaccine?

Yes. Staff will continue to be tested for COVID-19 after the second dose. This is based on the Ontario Ministry of Long-Term Care guidelines. Any changes to this guideline will be communicated promptly.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine be made mandatory for LTC and RH staff in the future? If the COVID-19 vaccine becomes mandatory, will medical exceptions be accepted, and will staff be able to work in LTC and RH with these medical exceptions?

At this time, the COVID-19 vaccine is not mandatory, but highly encouraged for staff to help protect against the COVID-19 virus. Medical exceptions are not currently required.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.phsd.ca/health-topics-programs/vaccines-immunizations/coronavirus-covid-19-vaccine/>