

Answering Your Questions about the Vaccine

Date: March 3rd, 2021

Can I choose which vaccine I get?

No. The vaccine you get depends on the vaccines in your area. The vaccines that are distributed to your area are based on recommendations from health experts. They are aware of which virus is the most widespread in each region and which vaccines are the most appropriate.

Vaccines are considered generally safe for most people. When you receive the vaccine, your immune system responds by producing antibodies which protect you over time. A common side effect is a low grade fever, which means your immune system is working to produce the antibodies that it needs to fight the virus.

For many, the possible side effects or risks from the vaccine could be much less significant than the side effects of the COVID-19 virus, which can be fatal. However, if you have a pre-existing condition that would put your health at risk if you were vaccinated, you should have a discussion with a health professional to make the best, most informed decision for your situation. In COVID-19 documents, any conditions that could put your health at risk during vaccination are referred to as contraindications. If your health professional concludes that the benefits of the vaccine outweigh the potential risks for your situation, then you may be considered to receive the vaccination in another form. This information will be clearly explained on the consent form you review and sign before you receive the vaccination.

Allergic reactions have been reported after receiving mRNA COVID-19 vaccines. These reactions can range from minor skin reactions to anaphylaxis, but cases of anaphylaxis happen less than 0.1% of the time. Still, the cause of these reactions is being seriously investigated. Health experts are still trying to identify which non-medicinal ingredient(s) are responsible for these reactions. When they have evidence about which ingredient(s) could be causing these allergic reactions, this information will be widely communicated to the public.

Source: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines.html#b9>

Why aren't people with disabilities prioritized with seniors when our health conditions are so similar?

The group that makes recommendations about which groups should be targeted for vaccination is called The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). NACI is independent from the government, and they make recommendations to the Public Health

Agency of Canada. NACI's recommendations are based upon the best current available scientific knowledge.

[NACI's Guidance on the Prioritization of Initial Doses of COVID-19 Vaccine\(s\)](#) recommends a 3 Stage Plan to target vulnerable populations. Stage 1, the highest priority group, gives priority to residents and staff of congregate living settings that provide care for seniors, including long term care, assisted living, retirement homes, and chronic care hospitals. Meanwhile, other congregate settings such as quarters for migrant workers, correctional facilities, and homelessness shelters are included in Stage 2. NACI acknowledges that the number of COVID-19 outbreaks and clusters in congregate living situations have been beyond what has occurred in long-term care facilities.

The plan to have seniors vaccinated in Stage 1 is due to the fact that the outbreaks which have occurred in congregate living settings for seniors have resulted in a higher number of deaths and hospitalization of both residents and staff members. Also, the vaccination of adults who are 80 years of age and older are prioritized because evidence shows that the risks for hospitalization and mortality increase with every year of age by as much as 10%. When supply becomes available, the priority age limit will be decreased by 5 years at a time until age 70.

Sources: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci.html>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines.html#t2>

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

If me and a friend are both vaccinated, can we get together with no masks?

No. The vaccine does not give complete 100% protection, and social distancing practices need to continue. The Government has stated that it is still unknown how much individual immunity is enough to achieve community immunity. Even if you get two doses of the vaccine, you should continue to maintain physical distance and wear a face mask, even outdoors, when you are with people from outside of your immediate household. Rates of community transmission continue to increase in many areas across Canada. Without social distancing, some people may have unknowingly been exposed to COVID variants from other countries. Some of the current vaccines do not protect against these variants as they are different diseases.

Sources:

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/publications/diseases-conditions/what-you-need-to-know-covid-19-vaccine/what-you-need-to-know-covid-19-vaccine-eng.pdf>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/about.html>

Do I have protection from the variants if I have had COVID already?

No. Each variant is a different disease, so you do not have immunity from them even if you have had COVID. These genetic variations, including those identified in the U.K. and South Africa, are being closely monitored by the federal government and health experts around the world.

Source: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/about.html>

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at www.ontario.ca/coronavirus. Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675