

COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Compiled by: Niraj Maulkhan, PharmD, RPh - TC FHT's Clinical Pharmacist

Reviewed By: Exec. Dir./Lead Physicians

On a regular basis, this FAQ document about the COVID-19 vaccine and its availability will be updated. Questions have been chosen using multiple sources (e.g., Gov't of Canada, Toronto Public Health, Ontario College of Pharmacists, Ontario College of Family Physicians, St. Michael's Family Health Team, etc.) and also from patient questions. Content will be added and updated so please [check back regularly](#).

Reviewed: October 7th, 2021

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Health Canada has authorized brand name changes for three COVID-19 vaccines approved for use. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will now be named Comirnaty, the Moderna vaccine will be named SpikeVax, and the AstraZeneca vaccine will be named Vaxzevria. For the purposes of this document, the vaccines will be referred to by the name of the manufacturer and more commonly known names.

1. Who can receive the COVID-19 vaccine and how can I schedule my first and second doses?

October 1st Update: Ontario is issuing a preferential recommendation of the use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for individuals aged 18-24 years old, please see question 5 for more information.

For first doses:

All Ontarians born in 2009 or earlier are eligible to book a **first dose** of the COVID-19 vaccine. Of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna.

For second doses:

If your first dose was AstraZeneca: you can get AstraZeneca, Moderna, or Pfizer for your second dose when it's at least **8 weeks** after your first dose.

If your first dose was Pfizer or Moderna: You can get your accelerated second dose according to the following schedule, as long as it's been at least **28 days** since your first dose.

Scheduling:

For booking through the provincial vaccination registration system: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/book-vaccine/> or by calling the Provincial booking system at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY 1-866-797-0007).

For booking through pharmacies, please note each pharmacy may carry a different vaccine (Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca), please use the filters provided in the following link to determine which vaccine the pharmacies near you are carrying: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/vaccine-locations>

2. Who is eligible for a third dose of the COVID vaccine and how can I schedule it?

On Sept 14th, 2021, the Government of Ontario announced that third doses are now recommended for the following groups of people:

Residents of long-term care homes, high-risk retirement homes and elder care lodges

- A third dose can be given at a **minimum of five months (20 weeks) after the second dose**
 - The Government of Ontario has identified Toronto settings that meet the criteria for high-risk. At this time, only those that have been identified are eligible.

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- *Toronto Public Health is actively working with Toronto facilities to plan this roll-out.*

Severely immunocompromised individuals:

- A third dose can be given at a minimum of **eight weeks** after the second dose for:
 - People undergoing active treatment* for solid tumors and hematologic malignancies
 - Recipients of a solid-organ transplant and taking immunosuppressive therapy
 - Recipients of chimeric antigen receptor (CAR)-T-cell or hematopoietic stem cell transplant (within two years of transplantation or taking immunosuppression therapy)
 - People with moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (e.g. DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
 - People who have Stage 3 or advanced untreated HIV infection and people with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
 - People undergoing active treatment** with the following categories of immunosuppressive therapies: high-dose systemic corticosteroids, alkylating agents, antimetabolites, tumor-necrosis (TNF) blockers, and anti-B cell therapies (monoclonal antibodies targeting CD19, CD20 and CD22)

*Active treatment includes patients who have completed treatment within 3 months. Active treatment is defined as chemotherapy, targeted therapies, immunotherapy, and excludes individuals receiving therapy that does not suppress the immune system (e.g. solely hormonal therapy or radiation therapy). See Ontario Health/Cancer Care Ontario's Frequently Asked Questions for more information.

**Active treatment for patients receiving B-cell depleting therapy includes patients who have completed treatment within 12 months

Specialists are to provide eligible patients with third dose referral forms/letter. If you are unable to obtain from your specialist; contact your primary care provider at TC FHT.

Detailed information on when and how people who are eligible can access their third dose will be updated here and communicated when available.

<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-how-to-get-vaccinated/?accordion=vaccine-eligibility>

3. Do I need a third dose of the COVID vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccines provide strong protection against illness and severe outcomes, and at this time third doses of vaccine are not recommended for the general population.

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Certain populations may demonstrate a suboptimal immune response to a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series due to underlying health conditions. There is also some evidence to indicate that the vulnerable elderly population develop less of an initial immune response and exhibit more rapid waning of antibody. In these populations, a third dose of the current mRNA COVID-19 vaccines is recommended as described in the [COVID-19 Vaccination Recommendations for Special Populations](#).

4. Which vaccine should I receive for my first, second and third dose?

October 1st Update: Ontario is issuing a preferential recommendation of the use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for individuals aged 18-24 years old, please see question 5 for more information.

For first dose COVID-19 vaccines:

Please take the first vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) offered to you. They are both very effective at preventing severe disease, hospitalization and death from to COVID-19.

Note: The AstraZeneca vaccine is only available as a second dose for individuals that received it for their first dose. The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are currently being offered in Canada for both first and second doses.

For more information on vaccine effectiveness and what that means in real world terms, this 7-minute video provides an excellent summary: <https://youtu.be/K3odScka55A>

For second and third dose COVID-19 vaccines:

If your first dose was:

- Moderna or Pfizer: you should get the same vaccine for your **second dose and third dose** when you are eligible and it's at least 28 days after your first dose. You can switch between Moderna and Pfizer safely if the original vaccine you received is not readily available.
- AstraZeneca: you can get AstraZeneca, Moderna, or Pfizer for your second dose when you are eligible and it's at least 8 weeks after your first dose.

For those who received a first dose of AstraZeneca, the decision to choose between receiving a second AstraZeneca dose or one of the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna) can be confusing. Getting the same vaccine for the first and second dose or a mixed schedule are both considered valid options, and both will count as a completed series. However, the most recent recommendations from NACI favour having an mRNA dose as your second dose based on emerging evidence of a potentially better immune response from this mixed vaccine schedule

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and mitigating the potential risk of VITT associated with viral vector vaccines. People who received two doses of AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine can rest assured that the vaccine provides good protection against infection and very good protection against severe disease and hospitalization.

Studies using different COVID-19 vaccine products in a series are ongoing and real-world evidence continue to be shared. Here are some key considerations to aid you in making an informed decision:

Safety:

- The risk of VITT with the second dose of AstraZeneca is estimated to be 1 in 600,000
- There is no known risk of blood clots or VITT with Moderna or Pfizer
- With any vaccine you may feel more, the same or fewer side effects than your first dose. Side effects can include a sore arm, fatigue, headache, body aches and chills lasting 1-3 days.

Effectiveness:

- When two doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine were spread out by 12 weeks, it provided an estimated 80% protection against symptomatic disease.
- A second dose of Moderna or Pfizer may offer more protection against the variants than AstraZeneca as there is evidence that having an mRNA vaccine after an AstraZeneca vaccine will boost the immune response, which is what we expect from any second dose of a vaccine. However, it is not yet known if the immune response from a series using different vaccines will be the same as the immune response of a vaccine series that uses the same vaccine. Several studies are currently underway to assess this.

Availability:

- Canada has a larger supply of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines and may be easier find and schedule an appointment earlier once eligible

In summary: All of the options are safe, provide strong protection against COVID-19 and will count as a completed series (you will be fully vaccinated). However, having an mRNA vaccine as your second dose is preferred.

Here are some helpful resources to help you decide on which vaccine to receive if you received the AstraZeneca vaccine for your first dose:

Posted June 17th, 2021

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines/summary-statement-june-17-2021.html>

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https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/COVID-19_vaccine_info_AZ_2nd_dose.pdf

5. Which vaccine should be given for those under 25?

As of September 29th, 2021, Ontario is now recommending the Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine for People 18-24 Years Old over the Moderna vaccine.

Ontario is issuing a preferential recommendation of the use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for individuals aged 18-24 years old effective immediately based on the current available analysis from Ontario's adverse events following immunization surveillance system. Specifically, this is due to an [observed increase in Ontario of the very rare heart condition called pericarditis/myocarditis](#) following vaccination with Moderna compared to Pfizer in the 18 to 24 year old age group, particularly among males. Note: The province will continue using the Pfizer vaccine for youth ages 12-17 (including those turning 12 in 2021).

The majority of reported pericarditis/myocarditis cases have been mild, with affected individuals recovering quickly, usually with the help of anti-inflammatory medication.

Symptoms have typically been reported one week after a vaccine shot and more commonly after a second dose. The province assures that those who have not reported symptoms should feel confident they will not develop the rare side effect at a later date.

Individuals who received Moderna for their first dose:

- Can safely take the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for their second dose. Mixing vaccines is safe and effective, and full vaccination with two doses of the mRNA vaccine offers the greatest protection against COVID-19 and the Delta variant.
- Can continue to take the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine for their second dose with informed consent.

For more information: [Ontario Recommends the use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for Individuals Aged 18-24 Years Old](#)

6. What is a vaccine passport, how can I prove I have both doses?

A vaccine passport, or more commonly known as an immunization record, is documentation that you have received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

After you are vaccinated, you can log in to the [provincial portal](#) to download or print an electronic COVID-19 vaccine receipt (PDF) for each dose you have received.

For those who live in Toronto and received a first or second dose outside Ontario, please document your vaccine in the [Toronto Public Health's online Portal](#).

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7. What are valid medical exemptions from the COVID-19 vaccines?

There are only two valid medical exemptions to receiving the COVID-19 vaccines:

1. Severe allergic reaction or anaphylaxis to a component of a COVID-19 vaccine
 - Qualifies for medical exemption only if:
 - Allergy was documented and evaluated by an allergist/immunologist; AND
 - Discussion with allergist/immunologist has occurred on potential options for immunization with the same or alternative COVID-19 vaccine; AND
 - Allergist/immunologist has determined that the individual is unable to receive any COVID-19 vaccine
2. If an individual suffered myocarditis or pericarditis after the first dose of a vaccine.
 - Individuals with a diagnosed episode of myocarditis and/or pericarditis after receipt of their first dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine should defer their second dose in the vaccination series until more information and guidance is available.
 - Qualifies for medical exemption only if:
 - myocarditis/pericarditis was diagnosed after medical evaluation (e.g. ER physician, relevant specialist).
 - In situations where there is uncertainty regarding myocarditis/pericarditis diagnosis, discussion should occur with a relevant specialist on potential options for (re)immunization with the same or alternative COVID-19 vaccine, including a risk-benefit analysis for the individual. The individual qualifies for a medical exemption if the specialist has determined that the individual is unable to receive any COVID-19 vaccine

8. Will Taddle Creek Family Health Team (TCFHT) be providing the COVID-19 vaccine?

TC FHT is NOT providing the COVID-19 vaccine, however we participated in the city of Toronto's mass vaccination clinics and pop-up clinics in the community. With vaccine supply increasing, more vaccines are available in a wide variety of ways including some family practices across Ontario. If at any point TC FHT provides COVID-19 vaccines in the future, we will let you know.

9. I have allergies, is it safe for me to get the vaccine?

Over 56 million COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Canada as of October 1st, 2021. Serious adverse events and anaphylaxis are very rare with the COVID-19 vaccines, occurring in only 0.009% of doses given. Unless you have a history of allergic reaction to components of the vaccine, or to the first dose of the vaccine, Health Canada recommends vaccination.

When you receive a vaccination, it is always advised to wait at least 15 minutes after receiving a vaccine, since an allergic reaction or anaphylaxis is possible. For those with a history of allergies, even to food, pets or other non-medical causes, waiting 30 minutes after receiving a vaccine is recommended.

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By clicking the vaccine name below you can review the vaccine ingredients in non-medical terms and [learn more about polyethylene glycol](#).

[Pfizer-BioNTech](#)

[Moderna](#)

[AstraZeneca](#)

[Johnson & Johnson](#)

Reference:

Centre for Effective Practice: <https://tools.cep.health/tool/covid-19-vaccines/#allergicreaction>

10. Can I receive other vaccines at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine?

As a precaution, it was previously recommended that COVID-19 vaccines be given at least 28 days before and 14 days after other vaccines. After reviewing the evolving evidence on COVID-19 vaccine NACI and Toronto Public Health now recommends that: [COVID-19 vaccines may be given at the same time as, or any time before or after, other vaccines, including live, non-live, adjuvanted or unadjuvanted vaccines](#). This would include the flu shot.

Reference: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines/summary-updates-september-28-2021.html>

11. Can I take medication for pain after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine injection?

Side effects such as shoulder pain or fever are generally mild and should only last a few days. Applying a cool damp cloth where the vaccine was given may help with soreness.

If needed, you may use over-the-counter medicine such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, acetylsalicylic acid (ASA), or antihistamines for any pain and discomfort you may experience after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, and you have no other medical reasons that prevent you from taking these medications. It is not recommended to take these medications before vaccination for the purpose of trying to prevent side effects.

12. How long after having had COVID-19 can one get the vaccine?

While there is not a mandatory waiting period between having COVID-19 disease and being immunized, it is recommended that people wait until they are feeling better, with no symptoms of a new illness (such as recent fever or cough).

Additionally, symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals who have been advised to self-isolate due to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection or due to close contact with a COVID-19 case should not attend a vaccine clinic and should wait to get their vaccine until their isolation period is over.

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13. Should a patient who previously had COVID-19 receive the full course of the two-dose vaccine (versus a single dose only)?

For now, those who have previously had COVID should get a full course of the vaccine. It is still uncertain how long protection or immunity against the COVID-19 virus will last in these individuals.

14. Does the vaccine stop transmission of the virus? Can vaccinated people gather together with others who are vaccinated?

Although the vaccine will protect you, at this time it hasn't been proven that getting vaccinated will stop you from carrying the virus and possibly infecting others.

[The Public Health Agency of Canada](#) has provided guidance on what being vaccinated against Covid-19 means for you. You still need to follow [Toronto Public Health advice for](#) public settings (workplaces, public transit) which include physical distancing, wearing a mask and hand hygiene.

Please note that you are partially protected 14 days after the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and you are considered fully vaccinated 14 days after your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

15. How long does the protection conferred by the vaccine(s) last?

Because the vaccines are relatively new, we don't know for sure how long the vaccines are protective and whether/when a booster may be needed. Information is being collected now in real time and research is ongoing to determine how long immunogenicity lasts.

16. What is the latest on vaccines for pregnant women?

Pregnant women were not part of the clinical trials for the vaccines. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada has stated the vaccine should be offered to pregnant women: "the documented risk of not getting the COVID-19 vaccine outweighs the theorized and undescribed risk of being vaccinated during pregnancy or while breastfeeding".

While there have been no safety issues with pregnancy or breastfeeding with any COVID-19 vaccine, NACI preferentially recommends receiving an mRNA vaccine as there is more real-world evidence supporting its use in this population.

While pregnant individuals are at a greater risk of severe illness, and there is growing evidence support the safe use of COVID -19 vaccines in pregnant and breastfeeding individuals, the Ministry of Health has prepared [this decision-making tool](#) to help those individuals make an informed decision.

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17. Are you vaccine hesitant?

We understand that the decision to get vaccinated can be confusing with all of the information out there.

If you would like to speak to someone about COVID-19 vaccines, make an appointment with a Taddle Creek physician, nurse practitioner, pharmacist or nurse. If you would like to have a more in depth, judgement-free discussion with expert doctors about COVID-19 vaccines, we suggest making an appointment with the [Scarborough Health Network – VaxFacts](#). They are ready to talk, listen and help you get the most accurate information.

In summary, the vaccines are safe and effective. We will continue to monitor the vaccine rollout and provide you with the most relevant science-based information as soon as we have it available to us.

Please remember, our healthcare professionals and offices remain accessible to you by phone or in person visits (if deemed necessary). Thank you all for what you have done to keep yourselves, your loved ones, and your communities safe.