

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: June 22, 2021

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1. Who can receive the COVID-19 vaccine and how can I book my first dose?

All Ontarians who have turned 12 years of age or older are eligible to book a **first dose** of the COVID-19 vaccine. Youth 12 to 17 years of age are currently only authorized by Health Canada to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Mobile and pop-up clinics have varying criteria for eligibility based on type of vaccine, age and postal code.

For a complete list of those currently eligible to receive the vaccine in the City of Toronto visit: <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-how-to-get-vaccinated/>

Residents who are eligible can book an appointment at immunization clinics in Toronto using the [Province's vaccination registration system](#) or by calling the Provincial booking system at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY 1-866-797-0007).

2. When can I book my second dose appointment and how can I schedule it?

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.

- **Starting June 21st:**
 - individuals who received their first dose on or before May 9th
- **Starting June 23rd:**
 - individuals who received their first dose on or before May 30 **and** live in Durham, Halton, Hamilton, Peel, Porcupine, Simcoe-Muskoka, Toronto, Waterloo, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph or York public health units
- **Starting week of June 28th:**
 - All remaining Ontarians age 18 and older who have received their first dose (anyone who received their first dose on or after June 28 will be eligible to book an accelerated second dose)
- **To be accelerated from August 9 and 16 (date to be confirmed)**
 - People aged 12 to 25

Timing of second dose appointments may vary based on local considerations, vaccine supply and the date of your first dose appointment. For up-to-date details of the 2nd COVID-19 vaccine dose roll out schedule, please visit: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-getting-your-second-dose> and for individuals living in Toronto please visit this [Toronto Public Health website](#) for up-to-date 2nd dose eligibility.

Second dose appointments can be rebooked through the [province's vaccination registration system](#), and through pharmacies. For those in public health units who use their own booking

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system, or who received their doses from their primary care provider or through a pop-up clinic, more information will follow on how and when second dose booking and rebooking will be available. Some Toronto area hospitals have announced that they will be rebooking patients who had their first doses with them. For patients who had their first dose appointment at the West End YMCA (931 College Street, Toronto) they will be contacting shortly after you become eligible via email or phone. If you do not hear from the schedulers from the YMCA one week after becoming eligible, please contact the Taddle Creek reception to help book your second appointment.

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>

As always, please refer to <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-how-to-get-vaccinated/> for the most up-to-date information on vaccine eligibility.

3. Which vaccine should I receive for my first and second dose?

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 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 dose COVID-19 vaccines:

If your first dose was:

- Moderna or Pfizer: you should get the same vaccine for your second 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.

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- 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 and to mitigate 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.

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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>

Updated June 14th, 2021

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

Posted June 6th, 2021

https://uwaterloo.ca/pharmacy/sites/ca.pharmacy/files/uploads/files/i_got_astrazeneca_for_my_first_dose_what_should_i_do_for_my_second_-_long_version.pdf

4. I received the AstraZeneca for my first dose, should I wait 8 or 12 weeks before my 2nd COVID-19 vaccine?

On June 12th, Ontario reduced the minimum interval between the first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine from 12 weeks to 8 weeks. It is important to note that clinical trials showed that AstraZeneca vaccine offers the best protection when the two doses are spread out by 12 weeks. When the doses were spread out by ≥ 12 weeks, as it provided an estimated 82% protection against symptomatic disease. When the two doses were given closer together (9-12 weeks), protection was estimated at 69%. While it is unclear if this applies to mixing vaccines, it is likely that mixing vaccines may provide better protection with a ≥ 12 -week interval opposed to an 8-week interval.

In summary, if you feel you are at a low risk of contracting the COVID-19 infection, then it may be preferred to wait the 12-week interval. Please see Question 2 for more information on select

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

At this time TC FHT is NOT providing the COVID-19 vaccine, however we are participating 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 is to provide COVID-19 vaccine we will let you know.

6. Why did the government decide to pause the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine for first doses?

We now know that the AstraZeneca vaccine is associated with a syndrome involving unusual blood clots and reduced platelets. This syndrome is most commonly called VITT (Vaccine-Induced Thrombotic Thrombocytopenia). It happens between 4 and 28 days after the vaccine

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and occurs in around 1 in every 50,000 individuals receiving their first dose. You can [read more about VITT here](#).

The government made the decision to pause the use of AstraZeneca because of the small risk of VITT and because we will have enough other vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) to vaccinate everyone in Ontario even without the AstraZeneca vaccine.

7. I got the AstraZeneca vaccine. Did I make the wrong decision? Was I misled?

You made the right decision at the time! We are in a pandemic and what we know is constantly changing based on new studies and reports that come out. VITT is a rare event so it wasn't picked up in the early trials that included ~20,000 people. But now millions of people around the world have had the AstraZeneca vaccine. Reporting systems around the world worked and picked up on this rare side effect.

At first, we thought it was happening in only 1 in a million doses. But on Friday May 7th, the Ontario Science Table issued a new report that clarified that VITT likely occurs in 1 in 50,000 individuals receiving their first dose of AstraZeneca which is a lot more common than we thought, **but still rare when you look at absolute numbers**.

As healthcare professionals, we encouraged people to get the AstraZeneca vaccine last month because we thought the benefits of preventing COVID-19 outweighed the risks of a serious reaction. However, now we know that the risks are higher than we thought, **and we're waiting for more guidance from NACI and provincial health authorities before we resume the administration of AstraZeneca vaccines for first doses**.

8. Does VITT occur with other vaccines?

VITT seems to occur with both the AstraZeneca and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine which are both types of viral vector vaccines. It does not happen with the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines which are mRNA vaccines.

9. Am I at risk of VITT?

If you received the AstraZeneca vaccine more than 28 days ago, then you have nothing to be concerned about. If you received a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, you also have nothing to worry about. If you received the AstraZeneca vaccine within the last 28 days, there is a very small chance you could get VITT so please monitor for the symptoms listed below.

10. What are the symptoms of VITT? What should I do if I'm worried?

Here are the symptoms of VITT you should monitor for: severe headache that does not go away, seizure, difficulty moving part of your body, new blurry vision or double vision that does not go away, difficulty speaking, shortness of breath, severe chest, back, or abdominal pain, unusual bleeding or bruising, new reddish or purplish spots, or blood blisters, new, severe swelling, pain, or colour change of an arm or a leg.

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If these symptoms are severe, please call 911 and go to the nearest emergency department. If your symptoms are not severe, you can discuss them (virtually or in-person) with your doctor, nurse practitioner or nurse.

Please note that after a vaccination, it is normal to feel tired, achy, feverish, have soreness at injection site, or a mild headache within the first 3 days. Those are not signs of VITT.

11. Is VITT treatable?

Yes, VITT can be treated in the hospital if the symptoms listed above are detected early. Health care providers are getting better at knowing what VITT is and how to treat and diagnose it. Effective treatments are available, including blood thinners and products containing antibodies used to strengthen the immune system.

Many thanks to St. Michael's Hospital Academic Family Health Team for providing the AstraZeneca vaccine FAQ for questions 5-10.

12. I received the AstraZeneca shot and feeling really stressed and anxious. What can I do?

Remember that you made a good choice to protect yourself from COVID-19 and you are already getting some of that benefit! The risk of VITT is very, very small. Keep in mind that the UK has given the vaccine to millions of its residents and it is doing very well right now in terms of COVID-19.

If you're struggling with anxiety, check out this website from the Government of Canada that provides resources and also virtual counselling <https://wellnesstogether.ca>

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

Over 14 million COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Canada as of May 3rd, 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.

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

[Pfizer-BioNTech](#)

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Moderna

AstraZeneca

Johnson & Johnson

Reference:

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

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

A waiting period before and after receiving another type of vaccine is recommended so that any side effects from one vaccine are not confused with side effects of another. The recommendation is to wait at least **14 days** after receiving another vaccine before receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, and at least **28 days** after receiving each COVID-19 vaccine dose before receiving another vaccine based on recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI).

15. 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.

16. 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.

Reference:

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

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

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17. Should a patient who had COVID-19 previously still 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.

18. 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. Given the current evidence, after vaccination everyone should continue to follow all public health measures, including physical distancing, wearing a mask and hand hygiene. Socializing with people from other households is still discouraged for now. 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.

19. 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.

20. 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.

Pregnant individuals are eligible to book their vaccines in Ontario at city immunization clinics and hospital immunization clinics. This comes as a response to the increase risk for severe illness for pregnant women infected with COVID-19.

21. When will the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 Vaccine be available and what are the risks associated it?

The Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine has been approved in Canada since March 5, 2021. Canada received 300,000 doses on April 26, however on April 30 Health Canada announced it was holding back the rollout of the vaccine due to quality concerns. These J&J doses will only be

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released for distribution once Health Canada ensures they have met its "high standards for quality, safety and efficacy".

We know the J&J vaccine's side effects are similar to other vaccines and are mild to moderate. Common side effects include pain at the site of injection, body chills, feeling tired and feeling feverish.

There have been reports of extremely rare blood clots reported within 13 days after receiving the Johnson and Johnson Covid-19 vaccine. In the U.S. as of May 7th there have been 28 very rare blood clot cases among nearly 8.7 million doses administered. Health Canada has ensured that the benefits continue to outweigh the risks at this time.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/janssen.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/JJUpdate.html>

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.