

COVID-19 VACCINE

How do I talk to my family members about the COVID-19 vaccines?



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It is important to know the facts about the COVID-19 vaccines so you can have an informed conversation with your family member about whether or not they should get the vaccine. This information sheet will help you with those conversations.

What is COVID-19?

- COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the 2019 coronavirus.
- COVID-19 can spread when someone who has the virus coughs, sneezes, talks or even breathes near another person.
- Some people might have the virus and not know it, and still spread it to others.
- People with COVID-19 may have the following symptoms:
 - cough
 - fever
 - tiredness
 - poor sense of taste or smell
 - trouble breathing
 - diarrhea or vomiting
 - chills
 - runny nose.
- Some people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms. Others may not feel sick at all. But some people with COVID-19 get very sick and can die.

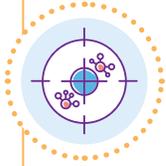
What is a vaccine?

- A vaccine tells your immune system to make antibodies that help your body fight against a germ that could hurt you.
- Scientists make vaccines to protect you and other people against germs, including bacteria and viruses such as the coronavirus.
- We already get vaccines for other illnesses, like polio, the flu and measles.
- The COVID-19 vaccine works with your body's natural defences to fight off COVID-19, just like other vaccines fight off other germs.

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- The COVID-19 vaccine is given through a needle.
- Scientists and health care providers think fewer people will get sick with COVID-19 if more people have the vaccine.
- Scientists and health care providers think it is important for everyone to get the COVID-19 vaccine.



How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

- Canada has approved four COVID-19 vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson).
- Each vaccine was developed differently, but they are effective in protecting against COVID-19. See the [FAQ info sheet](#) in this series for information on the differences between the four vaccines.
- The COVID-19 vaccines train your immune system to make antibodies against the coronavirus. If you are exposed to the COVID-19 virus after getting the vaccine, the antibodies are ready to help fight it off and keep you from getting sick.
- None of the COVID-19 vaccines contain the COVID-19 virus, so they cannot give you COVID-19. Instead, the vaccines give your body a recipe to make antibodies.



How many shots of the COVID-19 vaccines do I need?

- Two shots of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines provide protection against COVID-19 for the general population (and are considered a full vaccination), but a third shot is now recommended for all people age 18 and older.

This is because:

- Vaccine protection can decrease over time.
- People with immuno-compromising conditions require a third dose given eight weeks following their second dose and a fourth dose (booster) 168 days after their third dose.
- Two shots are less effective against the new Omicron variant of COVID-19. A third shot provides better protection and can help stop the spread of the Omicron variant.
- Rapidly rising case counts increase the risk of exposure and transmission.
- Check out the Ontario government's COVID-19 vaccine website for the most up-to-date information on third doses, including the timing for the booster or third dose <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/getting-covid-19-vaccine#booster-doses>



How do we know if the vaccines are safe?

- We know all four vaccines are effective, and they are the main way we will beat COVID-19.
- The vaccines will prevent people from dying or needing to go to the hospital because of COVID-19.

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- The vaccines do not give you COVID-19. They work with your immune system so that your body will be ready to fight the virus if you come in contact with it.
- Doctors and scientists have worked to make sure that the vaccines are safe. They continue to monitor vaccine safety to identify any rare side effects. This helps to ensure that we maintain a safe and effective vaccine supply.
- Scientists tested the vaccines with many, many people. They gave all the people in the tests a needle. Some people had a vaccine in their needle and some people got a needle that didn't have a vaccine in it.
- Then the scientists looked at what happened to the people in both groups over time.
- Almost all the people who got a vaccine didn't get sick. A lot more people got sick who did not get a vaccine.
- After millions of people received the vaccines, it was discovered that the AstraZeneca and Janssen vaccines can cause a rare but serious blood disorder called vaccine-induced thrombotic thrombocytopenia (VITT). It can cause blood clots, ICU admission and even death. However, safety monitoring is so strict that scientists were able to notice this rare side effect. We only use these vaccines under rare circumstances and recommend the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines.
- Please talk to your health care provider if you are worried about any of the vaccines.



What are the side effects of the vaccines?

- Common side effects include:
 - sore arm
 - redness and swelling where you got the needle
 - feeling tired
 - headache
 - mild fever or chills
 - muscle ache or joint pain.
- These side effects are usually mild or moderate and go away after a few days.



What about blood clots associated with some of the vaccines?

- VITT is a rare but serious blood disorder. It can develop in anyone four to 28 days after getting the AstraZeneca or Janssen vaccines.
 - People who have had a similar disorder called heparin-induced thrombocytopenia or who have had cerebral sinus vein thrombosis may be at higher risk of developing VITT. The disorder can lead to certain types of blood clots, ICU admission and even death.

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- COVID-19 can also cause blood clots, ICU admission and death. In some cases, the risk of developing health problems from the AstraZeneca or Janssen vaccine may be much lower than the risk of having a serious complication from COVID-19. Speak with your health care provider to get information about your risks and to help you decide whether to get these vaccines.
- Due to the higher risk of VITT with the AstraZeneca vaccine, the Ontario government has decided to recommend the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines because they have not been associated with VITT.
- See the [FAQ info sheet](#) in this series for more information about VITT and the AstraZeneca vaccine.



What about myocarditis and pericarditis?

- Myocarditis is inflammation of the heart muscle. Pericarditis is inflammation of the outer lining of the heart. These conditions happen in rare cases with the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.
- These conditions occur in less than 1/10000 doses. They are more common following the second dose in people under age 30. They are more common in males than females. The conditions generally occur within seven days of receiving the shot.
- Symptoms include chest pain, shortness of breath and fluttering or pounding heart. People who have these symptoms should seek medical care.
- There have been no deaths associated with these conditions following vaccination.
- The risk of getting myocarditis or pericarditis from COVID-19 infection is about 16 times greater than from the vaccine. This means that the benefit of getting a vaccine outweighs the risk.



Is there anyone who should not get the vaccines?

- There are no COVID-19 vaccines approved for anyone under age 12. More tests are being done right now to make sure the vaccines are safe for children.
- If you have any symptoms that make you think you might have COVID-19, you might have to wait to get the vaccine.
- If you have an allergy to any of the vaccine's ingredients, such as **polyethylene glycol**, you should not get an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna). Polyethylene glycol is a common ingredient in products such as medication laxatives and cough syrup.
- If you are allergic to **polysorbate**, you should not get the AstraZeneca or Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines. Polysorbate is a common ingredient in products such as medication and makeup.
- People who have had heparin-induced thrombocytopenia or cerebral sinus vein thrombosis may be at higher risk of VITT, which could lead to blood clots, ICU admission and even death. They should not get the AstraZeneca or Janssen vaccine.
- If you had a serious allergic reaction to your first shot of a COVID-19 vaccine, ask your doctor if you should get a different type of vaccine.



Why is it important for people with mental illness and/or addictions to get the vaccine?

- This pandemic has been very hard for everyone, especially people with mental illness or alcohol and other drug problems
- People with serious mental illness are more vulnerable to getting COVID-19 and becoming very sick.
- People who take drugs, or are addicted to drugs, are more vulnerable to getting COVID-19.
- Vaccines protect the people who get them, and the people around them.
- The more people who say yes and get the vaccine, the sooner our lives can return to normal.
- People who do not get the vaccine will still be worried about getting COVID-19, and passing it on to others. They won't feel as free to do things when the pandemic is over.



How do I have a conversation with a family member about getting one of the COVID-19 vaccines?

- Start the conversation in a casual, curious and open manner to maintain trust.
- Listen carefully and acknowledge their questions, concerns and worries.
- Encourage them to talk to their doctor or a care team member to answer their questions and address their concerns.
- If they are willing, attending appointments to help them talk to their doctor about the vaccine could be helpful.
- Assure them that you would not be encouraging them to get the vaccine if you knew it would harm them.
- Remind them that you care for them and their health.
- Remind them that if more people get vaccinated, life will return to normal sooner.
- Mention that you will also get the vaccine as soon as it is available to you.



What if my family member is anxious or paranoid about getting one of the COVID-19 vaccines?

- Let your family member talk openly about their anxieties and paranoia around the vaccine, and listen to them.
- Tell them that their anxieties are valid. If they are anxious about how quickly the vaccine was developed, you can remind them that the technology is advanced and it has been a worldwide effort.
- Encourage them to talk to their doctor or care team members who might provide them with professional and medical answers, especially about the different types of vaccines. Ask them if they want you there for support.

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- Remind them that there is plenty of misinformation online and that not all resources are credible. Help guide them to reliable information sources.
- Do not bring up the topic constantly. Give them some space to read what you gave them or think about what the doctor told them.

What happens if my family member has an allergic reaction?

- Serious reactions or side effects from the vaccine are rare.
- Call 911 or talk to a doctor if your family member has:
 - trouble breathing
 - serious drowsiness
 - hives
 - fever
 - swelling of the face or mouth
 - seizures
 - a very pale face
 - feelings of pins and needles or numbness.
- If you received your first dose of AstraZeneca four to 28 days ago, be aware of symptoms that may indicate VITT. This is a rare condition, but if you experience the following symptoms in that period, please go to your nearest emergency room:
 - severe headache that does not go away
 - seizure
 - difficulty moving part of your body
 - new blurry 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 your arm or leg.

What about my family member's medications? Will the vaccines affect them?

- Most people who take medication don't need to worry about how their medications will mix with the vaccine. Still, this is a good question for them to ask their doctor or pharmacist.
- If your family member takes anticoagulants (blood thinners), they should tell the person giving them the vaccine so they can try to reduce any bruising they might get from the needle.



What if my family member does not want to get the vaccine? What are their rights?

- Getting a COVID-19 vaccine in Ontario is voluntary. Your family member can discuss whether getting the vaccine is right for them with their doctor, care team members, family and other people they trust.
- Before they get the vaccine, they will need to sign a consent form to show that they understand that they are getting the vaccine and that they agreed to get it. They can change their mind at any time before getting the vaccine. They can also ask for more information.
- Encourage them to talk to their doctor if they want more information about their rights.



What if my family member has a substitute decision maker?

- If your family member has a substitute decision maker (SDM), that person will make this decision for them. The substitute decision maker will need to consider anything they have expressed in the past about vaccination. If they have never said anything your family member has about getting the vaccine or about vaccination in general, their substitute decision maker will decide if the vaccine is in their best interest.
- Before your family member gets the vaccine, their substitute decision maker will sign a consent form on their behalf.
- Encourage your family member to talk to their doctor if they want more information about their rights.
- See this [FAQ info sheet](#) for information about consent if your family member is a minor.



After my family member gets the vaccine, do they still need to be careful?

- If you get one of the vaccines that requires two doses, you are not fully protected against COVID-19 after your first dose because it takes time for your body to be ready to fight the virus. You need the second dose of the vaccine to be fully protected.
- If you get the vaccine that requires only one dose, it will still take up to four weeks for you to become fully protected.
- It will take time to vaccinate everyone. Until most people are vaccinated, the COVID-19 virus can still be passed around.
- Even after you get the vaccine, you need to follow public health guidelines, such as these:
 - Wear a mask.
 - Wash or sanitize your hands often.
 - Stay six feet apart from other people when possible.
 - Avoid crowds.

If you or your family member have questions, consider talking to your family member's doctor.

This information sheet is not intended to be a resource for people who require screening for COVID-19 or who are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 911 immediately or go to your nearest emergency department.

For more information, visit www.camh.ca/covidvaccine

Adapted with permission from CAMH's Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre