

Updated: February 12, 2021

The following are questions and answers for the COVID-19 Immunization program. This document will be added to/updated as information becomes available.

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-  **NEW QUESTION & ANSWER**
 -  **RECENT QUESTION & ANSWER (FROM 1 PREVIOUS VERSION OF FAQ)**
 -  **UPDATED RESPONSE**
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VACCINE FACTS

1. Are the vaccines safe?

Health Canada reviews product safety data for all vaccines and drugs approved for use in Canada. They use rigorous analysis and testing to ensure both efficacy and safety. Health Canada completed a thorough, independent review of the evidence on the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and Health Canada has determined that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine meets the stringent safety, efficacy and quality requirements for use in Canada. Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada will continue to monitor vaccine safety, efficacy and quality. Read a [summary of the evidence and documents](#) related to the decision.

2. Why immunize for COVID-19?

The goal of immunizing for COVID-19 is to minimize serious illness and overall deaths, while minimizing societal disruption as a result of the pandemic.

3. How does it work?

Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna developed mRNA vaccines. mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that will trigger an immune response without using the live virus that causes COVID-19. Once triggered, our body then makes antibodies. These antibodies protect us from being infected if the real virus does enter our body in the future. 'RNA' stands for ribonucleic acid, which is a molecule that provides cells with instructions for making proteins. Messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines contain the genetic instructions for making the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein. This protein is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19.

When a person is given the vaccine, their cells will read the genetic instructions like a recipe and produce the spike protein. After the protein piece is made, the cell breaks down the instructions and gets rid of them. The cell then displays the protein piece on its surface. Our immune system recognizes that the protein doesn't belong there and begins building an immune response and making antibodies.

4. **RECENT:** How do immunizers decide who gets Pfizer and who gets Moderna?

Immunizers do not decide on the vaccine type to provide, this is determined by an operations committee. Vaccines are allocated by priority group and by vaccine storage and transport needs. People receiving the Pfizer vaccine are those who can travel to sites with ultra-cold storage capabilities. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are similar in their effectiveness in preventing COVID-19.

5. **RECENT:** When will other vaccine brands be approved that are being reviewed?

Health Canada has been reviewing AstraZeneca's vaccine since it was submitted on October 1, 2020, and is expediting the review of COVID-19 vaccines. Health Canada cannot provide a definite timeline for the completion of the review at this time ([read more here](#)). If there is approval of any additional vaccines, this information will be shared broadly by Health Canada. Updated information on vaccine procurement status is available on the [Health Canada website](#).

6. How soon does one get the second dose after the initial dose?

Both Pfizer and Moderna vaccine products require two doses for the series. You will be contacted by a public health professional to schedule your second dose 35-42 days after your first dose. The decision to extend the timeline for the second dose is based on sound science and is supported by both World Health Organization and National Advisory Committee on Immunization in Canada. [Read more](#) about the NACI's recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines (Jan. 12) on the Health Canada website. Dr. Bonnie Henry also addressed this topic in her update to the province on [January 11th](#).

How long after immunization can a person expect to remain immune? If the virus attenuates will it be similar to our yearly flu vaccine.

7. What happens where there are shortages – or shipping/product delays?

Island Health is arranging clinics on the assumption that the product will be available as scheduled, but if there are supply shortages we will readjust our timelines as needed. We have a team working to ensure that all second doses will be available for those individuals who received the first dose.

8. RECENT: If partial doses of vaccine remain in vials, could a half dose from one and a half dose from another be given in two injections?

BCCDC policy prohibits the combination of two vials to make another dose. Only one needle may be used per vial to prevent contamination.

9. Does the 2nd dose have to be from the same manufacturer?

Yes. Your first and second dose need to be from the same manufacturer.

10. Will there be an option to choose which vaccine you wish to receive?

Not at this time, as supply is targeted and limited.

11. Once vaccinated, and after 14 days, can a person still pass on COVID if they are asymptomatic?

After an individual receives the COVID-19 vaccine, it is not likely that they will be able to transmit the virus. However, there may be a small possibility that transmission may occur even following immunization, and we are still evaluating the evidence on this question. That is why it is important to continue to practice public health measures, such as hand washing, physical distancing, wearing a mask in indoor public spaces, limiting our social interactions, and staying home when sick.

12. How are the vaccines kept cold?

Wireless temperature monitoring will ensure all vaccine fridges maintain the required temperatures. The cold storage must meet monitoring and reporting regulations as required by the CDC, BCCDC and College of Pharmacists. Read more:

- [BC Pharmacists Cold Chain Management, accessed Dec 3, 2020](#)
- [BCCDC Biological management, accessed Dec 3, 2020](#)

13. RECENT: Is there an option to have an antibody test before receiving the vaccine?

No. The BCCDC currently has no intention to provide antibody tests prior to vaccination. If you had, or *may have* had, COVID-19 illness you should still get the vaccine. This is because you may not be immune to the virus that causes COVID-19 and you could get re-infected and become sick.

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ISLAND HEALTH ROLL-OUT

14. Who can get immunized?

The COVID-19 vaccine will be free for everyone over age 18 in BC, but will not be available to everyone right away. Vaccines in Island Health will be distributed in phases at locations across the health region for [priority populations](#), as identified by the Province.

15. Is there a priority list and schedule for distribution of the vaccine and who decides who gets it first?

Yes. The Province has created priority groups with the primary focus on age and protecting those who are most vulnerable (70+). The distribution is broken down into four phases. Island Health's roll-out to groups/individuals is aligned with the directions of the Province. Read more [here](#).

16. When will vaccines be available for the general public?

Vaccines for the general population are set to begin in April, starting with seniors, ages 79-60, in 5-year increments, as well as people aged 69-16 who are clinically vulnerable. In July, the remaining population, to age 18, will have the opportunity to get vaccinated. Island Health is not booking COVID-19 immunization appointments for the general public. This process will be coordinated and led by the Province. Everyone in B.C. for whom the vaccine is recommended will have the opportunity to be vaccinated for free by the end of 2021. Read more [here](#)

17. Why did other health authorities do their acute care staff first and we did long-term care?

Based on a needs analysis, both Coastal Health and Fraser Health received vaccine supplies first, putting them approximately 2-weeks ahead in their distribution. All health authorities are following the approach of the province with the set priority populations (see the provincial plan [here](#)).

18. **RECENT:** Have any people in administration (i.e. CEO, VPs, etc) received the vaccine?

Chief Medical Health Officer, Dr. Richard Stanwick, was the first member of Island Health's executive team to receive the vaccine on December 22, 2020 – at the same time as Dr. Bonnie Henry. This was done in a public way to 'walk the talk' and show confidence in the vaccine for staff, medical staff and the people we serve in Island Health. Any leader who also provides direct care to patients will be vaccinated along with the team that is identified in the priority order.

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WHERE AM I ON THE LIST...

19. RECENT: Will nurses who sign up to work at the immunization clinics be given the vaccine themselves before starting the role?

Nurses *may* have an opportunity to receive vaccine prior to the immunization clinic – or, if there are doses remaining after clinics, they will be prioritized to receive vaccine at that time.

20. RECENT: Where do team members who support direct care (allied health, porters, lab techs, MI techs) fall in the acute roll-out?

All staff who provide care or work in care areas, who were not vaccinated in Phase 1, will have the opportunity to receive vaccine in Phase 2.

21. RECENT: Are people and caregivers in group homes on the priority list to be vaccinated?

Yes, congregate living is included in Phase 2 of the [prioritization plan](#).

22. RECENT: When are Home and Community Care clients, who are high-risk, receiving the vaccine?

Home support clients are included in Phase 2 of the [prioritization plan](#). Community Health Workers who work in Assisted Living will be vaccinated in Phase 1, and the majority of Community Health Services staff will be vaccinated in Phase 2.

23. Were do Urgent Care teams fall?

Phase 2.

24. RECENT: Will staff with underlying medical conditions be prioritized over other staff?

Not as a general rule, but it is recommended you speak about your condition when booking your appointment with our immunization team.

25. RECENT: Where do non-clinical staff and those working at home fall?

Some non-clinical staff may be vaccinated in Phases 1 or 2 if they work on direct care units. The majority of non-clinical staff and staff who work at home will be vaccinated with the general population in Phase 4, or potentially Phase 3 if they suffer from a chronic health condition.

26. RECENT: Where do employees currently on leave (i.e. mat leave) fall?

Phase 4, or potentially Phase 3 if they suffer from a chronic health condition.

27. RECENT: When will staff at independent living with shared washrooms and over 1/3 residents over the age of 80 get put in line for the vaccine?

Phase 2.

28. RECENT: Where do specialist physicians/midwives/GPs fall?

Phase 2.

29. RECENT: Where do nurses who provide COVID testing fall?

Phase 2.

30. RECENT: Where do the labour delivery care teams fall?

Phase 2.

31. RECENT: Will spouses of health-care workers be prioritized to get the vaccine?

No. Spouses and family members of health-care workers will be vaccinated in Phase 3 or 4 of the roll-out. Read more about vaccine distribution to non-essential workers [here](#).

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GETTING YOUR VACCINE

32. UPDATED: How do I get booked for the vaccine?

When it is your cohort's turn, our call centre will reach out to book your immunization (via your home or cell phone number). Please clear your voice mail, and check messages regularly. The call centre will leave a message with a callback number (note: the number to call back is within the voice message itself, so please do not call the number on your phone display).

Our teams are preparing contact lists of health-care teams. If you have concerns about where you fit on the priority list, speak with your leader, who can reach out to the respective [immunization planning committee leader](#).

33. How do I get booked for the 2nd dose?

You will be called back for a second dose 35-42 days after your first dose. Island Health is carefully tracking each first dose, and prioritizing second doses during the recommended time frame.

34. RECENT: My vaccine was scheduled for today but was cancelled last night. When will it be rescheduled?

Following the product delays by Pfizer, we have had to reschedule clinics and reprioritize distribution. Teams and individuals will be contacted in order of priority groupings to schedule or re-schedule appointments. If you have any questions about your order, please speak with your manager/director.

35. RECENT: I'm a physician and don't check my @viha.ca email very often. Can I get vaccination information sent to my preferred email?

Privileged medical providers identify a preferred email for communication at the time of privileging with Island Health. This is the same email address used for the Medical Staff e-Bulletins distributed on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. If you are not receiving these bulletins, please contact MedStaffEngagement@viha.ca to update your contact information. The Medical Staff Engagement team is working with Island Health's immunization planning team and preferred emails will be used to communicate with physicians about scheduling vaccination appointments.

36. Will it be mandated for all IH employees to get a COVID vaccination?

No. The COVID-19 vaccine is being treated like the flu vaccine and people are free to choose whether they receive it or not.

37. If I refused due to uncertainty, but now wish to get the vaccine, who do I contact to get back in the queue?

Island Health staff who provide direct care or work in care areas, and wish to be vaccinated, will receive it by the end of Phase 2. If Phase 2 has passed, all British Columbian's 18+ will have the opportunity to get a vaccine by the fall of 2021, so there will be further opportunities to rebook an appointment.

38. What are the ramifications if I choose to not get the vaccine?

Receiving a COVID-19 vaccine is a personal choice. Employees are encouraged to read all of the facts about the vaccine and balance these with what is known to be the risks if you contract COVID. Without a vaccination you have a higher risk of contracting the disease and you have no way of knowing whether or not you will experience some of the potential complications related to having COVID. Un-vaccinated people are also more likely to transmit the disease to others. Workplace guidance is under development and will be released when available. If you choose not to have the vaccine now, just remember that you can change your mind at a future date.

40. I heard that there was "extra vaccine" at the end of a clinic, and it was offered to any staff available to get to there. Why does this happen?

We do not waste any vaccine. If people miss their appointment or there are overages at the end of a clinic, then we will reach out to the closest [priority population](#) available (or any available staff/medical staff if priority populations are not on-site) to ensure the thawed vaccine is used up.

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AFTER THE VACCINE

42. RECENT: What is the process to report adverse reactions to the COVID vaccine?

After your shot, you will be asked to wait for 15 minutes to ensure there are no immediate adverse reactions. Should there be a reportable event, the BCCDC has a [reporting process](#) for vaccine providers. [Learn more](#) about how B.C. is monitoring COVID vaccine safety and effectiveness.

43. After being vaccinated (1st or 2nd dose), when should a person be tested for COVID-19?

Following the vaccine and/or vaccine booster, if an employee experiences symptoms such as: tiredness, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, chills or fever, use the [BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) to help determine if further assessment or testing is needed. If a test is recommended, Health-care professionals can call: 1-833-737-9377 – 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. Family members and others can call: 1-844-901-8442 – 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

While the COVID-19 test is pending, employees can continue to work, wearing a gown, gloves, mask and eye protection, while providing direct patient care.

If your site is experiencing an outbreak, do not go to work, get tested and self isolate until your test results are back. Once your test is negative, you can return to work.

If the employee develops symptoms such as a cough, or other respiratory symptoms, these are not side effects of the vaccine and are more likely related to a respiratory illness such as COVID-19. If employees should develop such symptoms they should not work and then follow the regular process for booking a COVID-19 test.

Read more about [after-vaccine care](#).

44. Once vaccinated, is a person still required to follow the COVID safety measures?

Yes, staff must continue to practice public health measures for the prevention of COVID-19 infection and transmission regardless of vaccination status. Although we now have a safe and effective vaccine that has been approved for use here in Canada and available in BC, it is not enough to stop transmission in our communities at this time. We need to continue to follow public health measures, including frequent hand washing, maintaining physical distance, avoiding non-essential travel, wearing a mask in indoor public spaces, and staying home when sick.

45. Will Island Health's mask policy – and the Provincial policy for the public – still be in effect for people who are vaccinated?

Yes. The masking order is determined provincially and any changes to current orders will be shared by the Provincial Health Officer.

46. Can I obtain a copy of my COVID-19 immunization record and view my scheduled appointment through MyHealth? What about my children and/or dependants?

[MyHealth](#), Island Health's secure website, gives you access to your personal health information, including your scheduled COVID-19 immunization appointment. Staff, patients and family caregivers can easily view laboratory results (including COVID-19 test results) and medical imaging results, soon after tests are completed at Island Health collection sites, hospitals or clinics.

The Patient Portal project team is working on enhancements to make COVID-19 immunization records available in MyHealth. Staff will be notified when these planned features are available. In the

meantime, a print copy of your COVID-19 immunization record will be provided to you at the clinic. If lost, you can contact your local public health office to obtain a copy.

Enroll in MyHealth online (www.islandhealth.ca/myhealth), by phone (1-844-844-2219 M-F 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) or in-person at Island Health Laboratory and Medical Imaging locations, or the central admitting desk at any of our main hospitals. Once your MyHealth account is created, you can request access to someone else's account if needed. This may include access to health information for a child/minor, adolescent or adult. See [Request Access to Someone Else's MyHealth Account](#) for more information.

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ALLERGIES, SIDE EFFECTS AND COMPROMISED HEALTH

47. What are the side effects?

Side effects that follow immunization are mild or moderate and can include pain at the site of injection, body chills, feeling tired and/or feverish. Respiratory symptoms are not side effects of the vaccine. Use the [BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) to help determine if further assessment or testing is needed. If a test is recommended, Health-care professionals can call: 1-833-737-9377 – 8:30AM – 8PM daily. Family members and others can call: 1-844-901-8442 – 8:30AM – 8PM daily. While the COVID-19 test is pending, employees can continue to work, wearing a gown, gloves, mask and eye protection, while providing direct patient care. If your site is experiencing an outbreak, do not go to work, get tested and self isolate until your test results are back. Once your test is negative, you can return to work. Read more about side effects [here](#).

48. How soon do side effects appear and how long do they last?

Side effects can develop in the day or two after receiving the vaccine and should only last a day or two and resolve on their own.

49. **RECENT:** How many people have experienced anaphylaxis in Island Health?

We don't have Island Health data readily available yet, but the BCCDC is tracking reported adverse events in B.C. using strict criteria to monitor these reports and their cause. As of January 25th, of the 119,850 immunizations so far, there were:

- 10 reports of anaphylaxis (8/100,000) – slightly more than our influenza programs
- 1 hospitalization
- All have recovered

50. I have allergies and am worried about anaphylaxis. Should I get the vaccine? Which one is best for people with allergies?

Unless you have severe allergies, none of the approved vaccines have been contraindicated. If a reaction were to occur, we are prepared to manage anaphylaxis at all clinics, but we can also schedule people with allergies into a clinic at a hospital if necessary. If you have a reaction to the first shot, then please discuss with your physician whether to get the second shot. Over time we will be able to better identify which ingredients are contraindicated for which allergy – and which vaccine is best suited. We will be prepared for anaphylaxis at all clinics.

51. **UPDATED:** Should I get the vaccine if I'm pregnant or trying to get pregnant?

We know that COVID-19 can be more severe in pregnant woman and people with certain types of immune system problems, especially if they have other risk factors (i.e. age, obesity, comorbidity). It is our position that the risks of COVID-19 infection outweigh any unknown risk of getting vaccinated, and as such, we will be offering the vaccine to all eligible recipients. Read more about pregnancy and the COVID vaccine [here](#) (Q26).

52. UPDATED: Should I get the vaccine if I have an autoimmune disorder (and/or heart or lung disease and/or other compromising conditions)?

COVID-19 can be more severe in people who have certain types of immune system problems, especially if they have other risk factors like older age, obesity, and diabetes. As such, it is our position that the risk of COVID-19 infection outweighs any unknown risk of getting vaccinated, and as such, we will be offering the vaccine to all eligible recipients. Read more about immunocompromised individuals and the COVID vaccine [here](#) (Q26).

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COVID-19 GENETIC VARIANTS

53. UPDATED: What do we know about the new genetic variants of the virus that have emerged?

Information about the characteristics of these variants is rapidly emerging. Genetic variation of viruses such as the one that causes COVID-19 is to be expected and have been previously observed in parts of the world and in Canada. There is no evidence at this time that the mutations have any impact on symptom severity, antibody response, or vaccine efficacy. BC is reviewing cases to identify associations with variants in the province.

54. Have there been any cases of the new genetic variants in Canada?

Yes – there are cases of the variant strain in Canada. The first in BC was announced on [December 27, 2020](#), and that was in the Island Health region. This makes it even more imperative that we continue to maintain COVID safety measures and practices at work and act as healthcare leaders in our communities.

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LEARN MORE:

Island Health Intranet – [COVID Vaccine](#)

BCCDC: COVID Immunization Program – [Documents for health professionals](#)