

# COVID-19 vaccines - protein-based (age 18 years and older)

## What are COVID-19 vaccines?

COVID-19 vaccines protect against the SARS-CoV-2 virus (also known as COVID-19). The virus causes an infection in the lungs and airways and is a type of respiratory illness. In some cases, the infection can cause problems with other organs or other parts of the body. Go to [ahs.ca/covid](https://ahs.ca/covid) to learn more about COVID-19.

The following COVID-19 vaccines are approved for use in Canada:

- **mRNA vaccines:** Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty and Comirnaty Bivalent) and Moderna (SpikeVax and SpikeVax Bivalent)
- **viral vector-based vaccines:** AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria)/COVISHIELD and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson)
- **protein-based vaccine:** Novavax (Nuvaxovid)
- **plant-based vaccine:** Medicago (Covifenz)

The Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Janssen, and Novavax vaccines are available in Alberta. For information about the mRNA and viral vector-based vaccines, read the vaccine information sheets on [ImmunizeAlberta.ca](https://immunizealberta.ca).

## Who can get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?

Everyone is at risk of COVID-19. You can get a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you are age 18 years or older and you cannot have or do not want an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines are free.

## Do I need a vaccine if I have already had COVID-19?

If you have already had COVID-19, it is not yet known how long your protection will last or how much protection you will have against variants. It is important to get a COVID-19 vaccine even if you have already had the virus.

The vaccine may give you better protection if you wait a while after having COVID-19 and then get a vaccine. How long to wait depends on your health history, the number of doses of COVID-19 vaccine you have had, and your risk of getting very sick from COVID-19.

If you have had COVID-19 in the past, check with your healthcare provider about when to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

## How well do COVID-19 vaccines work?

How well the vaccines work against COVID-19 is different for each variant. COVID-19 vaccines are the best way to lower your risk of getting COVID-19 or getting very sick from it.

The mRNA vaccines give the best protection. The Moderna Bivalent and the Pfizer-BioNTech Bivalent vaccines are the only vaccines that are specifically made to protect against Omicron variants, which are the strains that are currently spreading. The protein-based vaccine gives more protection than the viral vector-based vaccines. However, all the vaccines work very well to lower your risk of getting seriously ill and needing to be in the hospital.

## How many doses of the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine do I need?

### Primary series

You need at least 2 doses of the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine. These doses are called your primary series.

For some people, 2 doses may not give enough protection. You may need a third dose to complete your primary series if you have a health problem that weakens your immune system. For example:

- You have had or will have an organ or stem cell transplant.
- You have kidney disease and need dialysis.
- You have acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).
- You take certain medicines that weaken your immune system.

Studies have shown that a third dose may provide better protection for adults with a weak immune system.

### Booster doses

A booster dose will help keep you protected during times when there will likely be lots of COVID-19 virus going around, such as fall and winter.

You can get a booster dose at least 5 months after your last dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, whether it was the final dose of your primary series or a booster dose.

You may get your booster dose at least 3 months after your last dose if you are at high risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 because you have a health condition or you live in a seniors care facility, such as a nursing home.

Talk to your healthcare provider about when you should get your booster dose.

Go to [alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine](https://alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine) to book an appointment for your booster dose.

## Can I get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

Yes, you can get a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. However, research shows that mRNA vaccines are the safest type of COVID-19 vaccines to get during pregnancy. There is more to learn about getting a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine when you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

When you are pregnant, you have a higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine lowers your risk of getting seriously ill from the virus.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it is recommended that you talk to your healthcare provider before getting a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

## Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Go to [ahs.ca/covidvaccine](https://ahs.ca/covidvaccine) to find out where and when you can get a COVID-19 vaccine.

## Are there side effects from the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?

There can be side effects from the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- redness, swelling, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- headache, feeling tired or unwell
- a fever or chills
- body aches, sore joints, or pain in your legs or arms
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea) or vomiting (throwing up)

Current information shows that you are more likely to have these side effects after your second dose of the protein-based vaccine. Research continues to find out more about the risk of side effects after additional doses.

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after your vaccine. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

### **What rare events have been reported after getting the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?**

There have been very rare reports of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the lining around the heart) shortly after getting the protein-based vaccine. The reported cases were mild and got better with treatment. It is still not known if these events were caused by the vaccine, and research is happening to learn more about the risk of these rare events after getting the protein-based vaccine.

The inflammation can cause shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, or a very fast or abnormal heart rate. Get medical help **right away** if you have any of these symptoms.

It is not known if having a history of myocarditis or pericarditis puts you at higher risk of having these rare events after a COVID-19 vaccine. Talk to your doctor before you get a dose of COVID-19 vaccine if:

- You had myocarditis or pericarditis within 6 weeks of getting a COVID-19 vaccine.
- You have a history of myocarditis or pericarditis and you have questions about getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

Your risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19 is much higher than your risk of having a rare event after these vaccines.

Go to COVID-19 vaccine – Frequently Asked Questions on [ahs.ca/topics/Page17389.aspx](https://ahs.ca/topics/Page17389.aspx) for more information.

### **How can I manage side effects?**

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with a fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dose to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

### **What vaccine will I get for my primary series?**

You will get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine for your primary series. If you cannot get or do not want that type of vaccine, you can get the protein-based or a viral vector-based vaccine if you are age 18 years or older.

Usually you get the same vaccine for all your doses. If your first-dose vaccine is not available or you cannot have it, you can get a different COVID-19 vaccine for your next dose.

Whichever vaccine you get to complete your primary series protects you against COVID-19.

Talk to your healthcare provider about which vaccine is best for you.

Go to [ahs.ca/seconddose](https://ahs.ca/seconddose) for more information.

### **What vaccine will I get for my booster dose?**

You will get an mRNA vaccine for your booster dose.

If you cannot get or do not want an mRNA vaccine, you can get the protein-based vaccine if you are age 18 years or older.

The protein-based vaccine is not licensed (approved for use) for more than 2 doses. But vaccine experts support this in certain situations. This is called “off-label use.”

Getting more than 2 doses of a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine is off-label use if:

- You get a three-dose primary series.
- You get a booster dose.

Talk to your healthcare provider about which vaccine you can get and when to have your doses.

### **What vaccine is recommended for people with a weak immune system?**

Research has shown mRNA vaccines provide the best protection for people with a weak immune system. Talk to your healthcare provider about which vaccine is best for you.

### **What if I had or am getting another type of vaccine?**

You can get most vaccines at the same time as, any time before, or any time after the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine. However, certain vaccines have a waiting period. If you had another vaccine in the last 2 weeks, check with your healthcare provider about when you can get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

### **Who should not get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?**

You may not be able to get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you:

- have an allergy to any part of the vaccine
- had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it
- are under age 18 years

Always tell your healthcare provider if you have allergies or if you have had a side effect from a vaccine in the past.

Check with your healthcare provider about when you can get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you had COVID-19 in the past.

Be sure to talk to your doctor **before** you get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you:

- have a weak immune system (because of a medicine you take or a health problem)
- have an autoimmune disorder (like rheumatoid arthritis or lupus)
- have had a stem cell or organ transplant
- have a history of myocarditis or pericarditis within 6 weeks of getting a dose of COVID-19 vaccine

### **For more information about immunization**



Call Health Link at **811**



Scan the QR code or go to **ImmunizeAlberta.ca**



Scan the QR code or go to **MyHealth.Alberta.ca**