

COVID-19 vaccines - viral vector-based (ages 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 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 protein-based vaccines, read the vaccine information sheets on [ImmunizeAlberta.ca](https://immunizealberta.ca).

Who can get a viral vector-based COVID-19 vaccine?

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

Primary series

If you got the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine (no longer available in Alberta), you need a second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. These doses are called your primary series.

If you get the Janssen vaccine, at this time you need only 1 dose to complete your primary series. However, it is likely that in the future you will need a second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine for better protection and to complete 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. When you can get your booster dose depends on what vaccine you get:

- If you get Janssen vaccine for your booster dose, you can get it at least 2 months after your primary series.
- If you get an mRNA or protein-based vaccine for your first booster dose, you can get it at least 5 months after your last dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, whether it was a final dose of your primary series or a booster dose.

If you are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, you can have the mRNA booster dose earlier than 5 months.

Talk to your healthcare provider about when you should get your booster dose. Go to alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine to book an appointment for your booster dose.

Can I get a viral vector-based COVID-19 vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

Yes, you can get a viral vector-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 viral vector-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 viral vector-based COVID-19 vaccine.

Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Go to ahs.ca/covidvaccine to find out where and when you can get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Are there side effects from the viral vector-based COVID-19 vaccine?

There can be side effects from the Janssen 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
- feeling tired
- a headache
- a fever or chills
- body aches or sore joints
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea)

Current information shows that there is a similar risk of side effects after a first, second, or additional dose of a viral vector-based COVID-19 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 AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD or the Janssen vaccines?

Research is still happening to learn more about the risk of rare events after getting the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD (no longer available in Alberta) or

Janssen vaccines. It is not yet known if having a history of certain health problems puts you at a higher risk of rare events after having these vaccines. 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 for more information.

Blood clots, low platelets, bleeding

There have been very rare reports of blood clots, low levels of platelets (these help your blood to clot), and bleeding after getting the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD or the Janssen vaccines.

These events happened 4 to 28 days after getting the vaccine. The risk of these events after getting the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine is about:

- 1 in 26,000 to 1 in 100,000 after the first dose
- 1 in 520,000 after the second dose

The risk of these events after getting the Janssen vaccine is about 1 in 300,000.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you have a condition that puts you at risk for blood clots or if you have ever had immune thrombocytopenia (ITP). ITP is when your immune system attacks the blood cells you need for normal blood clotting and causes bleeding.

If you have any of the following symptoms within 42 days of being immunized, get medical help **right away**:

- trouble talking or moving a part of your body
- shortness of breath
- chest pain
- severe swelling, pain, or a colour change in your arm or leg
- stomach pain that does not go away
- a severe headache that does not go away
- blurry vision
- confusion
- seizures
- bruising or bleeding that is not normal for you

Capillary leak syndrome

There have been very rare reports of capillary leak syndrome (CLS) within the first few days after getting the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD or Janssen vaccines. In some reported cases, the person had a history of CLS. CLS is a serious condition that causes fluid to leak from the small blood vessels (capillaries). This causes sudden swelling of the arms and legs, sudden weight gain, and low blood pressure causing you to feel faint. CLS can cause death. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any history of CLS. Get medical help **right away** if you have any of these symptoms.

Guillain-Barre syndrome

There have been very rare reports of Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS) up to 42 days after getting the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD or Janssen vaccines. GBS is a serious condition that causes pain or numbness, muscle weakness, and in severe cases, paralysis. Most people fully recover from GBS but some may continue to have symptoms. GBS can cause death. The risk of GBS after getting either AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD or Janssen vaccine is about 1 in 100,000. Get medical help **right away** if you have any of these symptoms.

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 this type of vaccine you can get the protein-based or the 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 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.

If you do not want an mRNA or a protein-based vaccine and you have only had 1 dose of Janssen vaccine (no other COVID-19 vaccines), you can get Janssen for your first booster dose if you are age 18 years or older. You cannot get a Janssen vaccine for a second booster dose.

The Janssen vaccine is not licensed (approved for use) for more than 2 doses. 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 a viral vector-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 a viral vector-based COVID-19 vaccine?

You may not be able to get a viral vector-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
- have a history of capillary leak syndrome (CLS)
- 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 a viral vector-based COVID-19 vaccine if you had COVID-19 in the past.

Be sure to talk to your doctor **before** you get a viral vector-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 immune thrombocytopenia (ITP)
- are at higher risk of blood clots

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**