

Ministry of Health

COVID-19: Vaccine FAQs for Parents and Guardians

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These FAQs provide basic information only. This document is not intended to provide or take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment or legal advice.

As parents and guardians trying to navigate the pandemic with children, it is important to have information available to answer your questions. The following are common questions and sources you can turn to for additional information not covered here.

Importance of being vaccinated

Should I get my adolescent vaccinated?

Both the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) recommend COVID-19 vaccination for those 12 years of age and older. Millions of youth have received the Pfizer vaccine without serious side effects.

As of August 18, individuals turning 12 in 2021 (2009 birth year) are eligible to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. This age group expansion was decided based on expert opinion and after close review of the experiences from other jurisdictions who have immunized this age cohort with no risks identified.

In general, children who get infected with COVID-19 usually experience mild symptoms. However, some kids can get very sick needing hospitalization. Children can also experience more serious, longer-lasting symptoms that can affect their health and well-being. In a few very rare cases, the virus can also cause death in children.

Like adults, children also can transmit the virus to others if they are infected, even if they don't feel sick. Some variants, such as the Delta variant, are more easily transmissible and can cause more severe symptoms.

Vaccinating all who are eligible, including adolescents, will help to reduce the number of cases of COVID-19 in our community and allow kids to get back to

participating in activities they enjoy. Vaccination will also help to protect younger children who are not yet eligible to receive the vaccine, as well as help to stop the virus from spreading and mutating into new harmful variants.

Even if your child may be virtual learning this school year, getting them vaccinated will protect them and others when they are in social settings with friends and family and while doing extra-curricular activities.

Is the vaccine required for my child to attend school?

No. COVID-19 vaccine is not required to attend school.

However, if there is a COVID-19 outbreak in your child's school and your child is not fully vaccinated, they may be excluded from attending in-person learning until the outbreak is over and it is safe for them to return.

Your local public health unit may contact you about your child's COVID-19 vaccination status to ensure they have up-to-date information on file.

Vaccine Safety

How can I be sure that the vaccine is safe for my child and will it work?

Currently, there are two vaccines that have been authorized by Health Canada for use in children and youth (aged 12 and older); the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the Moderna vaccine. These COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective and have been through all the steps that are normally taken to authorize a vaccine in Canada.

At this time, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines is primarily being provided in Ontario to adolescents between 12 to 17 years of age.

Prior to use in Canada all vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, are thoroughly reviewed by Health Canada, for safety and efficacy. Following approval of a product vaccine safety continues to be monitored through local and national vaccine safety monitoring systems.

In Ontario, health care providers are required to report potential adverse events following immunization to their local medical officer of health according to the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. This information is provided to Public Health Ontario (PHO) for review and monitoring on an ongoing basis and reporting to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to support national vaccine safety surveillance.

I've heard that the vaccine can cause heart conditions in children. Is my child at risk?

There have been Canadian and international reports of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the sac in which the heart sits inside of the chest) following vaccination with COVID-19 mRNA vaccines. Cases have occurred more frequently in males than in females, most frequently in adolescents and young adults under the age of 30 more commonly after the second dose of vaccine. The majority of reported cases have been mild with individuals recovering quickly. Symptoms have typically been reported to start within one week after vaccination.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) continues to strongly recommend that a complete series with an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine be offered to all eligible individuals in Canada, including those 12 years of age and older. mRNA vaccines continue to be recommended internationally. As a precautionary measure, NACI is recommending that individuals who experienced myocarditis/pericarditis after a first dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine should wait to receive a second dose until more information is available. NACI, PHO the Ministry of Health continue to follow this closely and will update this recommendation as more evidence becomes available. This situation is being monitored closely in Canada and internationally.

Who should not be vaccinated?

Most individuals can safely receive the vaccine.

People with severe allergies (i.e., anaphylaxis) to any of the vaccine ingredients or those who have had a severe allergic reaction after the first dose and/or those with certain health conditions should speak to their health care provider. See the [COVID-19 Vaccination Recommendations for Special Populations](#) for more information.

Getting Vaccinated

Where can I get my child vaccinated?

The vaccine is available at community clinics and some health care provider offices, walk-in clinics, and pharmacies. Some areas may be offering clinics for specific schools and communities. Find out where to get [vaccinated in your area](#).

Is parent/guardian consent required for my child to be immunized?

Vaccines are only provided if informed consent is received from the person, including those aged 12 to 17, as long as the person has the mental capacity to make this decision. This means the person understands what the vaccination involves, why it is being recommended and the risks and benefits of accepting or refusing to be vaccinated. If the individual is incapable of consenting to receiving the vaccine, consent would need to be obtained from their substitute decision-maker, such as their parent or legal guardian.

The health care provider and family must respect a young person's decision on whether to be immunized. Ideally, this decision should be discussed in advance with a trusted adult or guardian to ensure that they understand the choices they are making for their health. When a young person receives their vaccine, the health care provider giving them their shot will check that they understand the nature of the treatment and its risks and benefits.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to discuss vaccination with their children prior to attending a clinic.

Can the vaccine be given with other childhood vaccines and/or the flu vaccine?

Current recommendations are to receive the COVID-19 vaccine alone (i.e., not with other vaccines). Other vaccines should be scheduled 14 days before or 28 days after the COVID-19 vaccine.

Should my child be immunized if they've been sick with COVID-19 previously?

Yes. The vaccine is recommended even if you have already had COVID-19. Although a past COVID-19 infection may provide some protection from getting sick again, it is not known how long that protection will last, and it may not protect against new variants of the virus. If your child is currently recovering from COVID-19, vaccination can be delayed until they are feeling better and no longer in self-isolation.

My child is nervous about getting vaccinated. How can I help them?

Getting a vaccine can be stressful for some people. Prepare your child before the visit by being honest and explain the shot can pinch or sting, but that it will not last for long. Let them know that the vaccine is important for their protection against COVID-19. Encourage them to use distractions like their mobile device or a book.

Deep breathing and/or counting, as well as keeping the arm relaxed and still may help to make the shot easier.

For more information on improving the immunization experience, please see the Vaccination Pain Management: [CARD System Learning Hub \(aboutkidshealth.ca\)](https://aboutkidshealth.ca)

When will my younger child be eligible to get vaccinated?

Clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines for children under 12 years of age are currently underway. It is anticipated that expanded approval of COVID-19 vaccines will mean that younger children can be vaccinated in the coming months.

After vaccination

What are the side effects of the vaccine? What should I watch for and when should I seek medical advice?

Like any vaccine or medication, there may be some side effects after getting the COVID-19 vaccine. These side effects are usually mild and will go away after a few days. Side effects may include pain, redness and/or swelling at the injection site, feeling tired, headache, muscle or joint pain, fever or chills, swollen glands, diarrhea, nausea and/or vomiting.

Symptoms of heart inflammation (myocarditis/pericarditis) may include chest pain, feelings of tightness, shortness of breath or heart palpitations/irregular heartbeat. Seek medical attention if your child experiences any of these symptoms after getting vaccinated.

Serious side effects after receiving the vaccine are rare. Seek medical attention right away or call 911 if your child is severely unwell, or if they experience symptoms such as hives, swelling of the face or mouth, trouble breathing, high fever (over 40°C), or convulsions.

Will my child need to wear a mask after being vaccinated?

Being vaccinated along with additional public health measures like physical distancing, masking, and handwashing continue to be recommended and are the best ways to protect your child, your family, and your community from COVID-19.

Can my child get COVID-19 infection after getting vaccinated?

No vaccine is 100% effective, so it is possible to be infected with COVID-19 after being vaccinated. The data is clear, however, that being vaccinated provides very good protection against COVID-19 and that if infected with COVID-19 variants including the Delta variant, being vaccinated greatly reduces the severity of illness including hospitalization and death.

Do I need to report that my child received COVID-19 vaccine to their school or my local public health unit?

No. Your child will be given a receipt after vaccination with information about the vaccine they received. It will also be emailed or texted if you provide that contact information. Make sure to keep this receipt in a safe place in case your local public health unit requires the information to confirm or manage any outbreaks in your child's school if they occur.

Will my child need booster doses in the future?

At this time, third doses are only recommended for certain populations, such as immunocompromised individuals or vulnerable elderly in high-risk congregate care settings. For more information, see the [COVID-19 Vaccination Recommendations for Special Populations](#).

Where can I get more information?

Not all information about COVID-19 and the vaccines that you will find online is factual. It is important to pay attention to the source of the information that you are looking at. The links below are a place to start for reliable sources of information.

- Government of Ontario; [COVID-19 communication resources | Ontario.ca](#)
- Public Health Ontario; [Welcome | Public Health Ontario](#)
- Your local public health unit; locate your health unit at [Public Health Unit Locations - Public Health Units - Health Services in Your Community - MOHLTC \(gov.on.ca\)](#)