



Updated: Oct 28, 2021

## VACCINE INFORMATION SHEET

# COVID-19 mRNA Vaccine

Moderna's Spikevax and Pfizer-BioNTech's Comirnaty are two different brands of messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines. This type of vaccine teaches your body to protect itself against COVID-19 without getting sick from the virus. Both mRNA vaccines were approved by Health Canada in December 2020.

Vaccines make your immune system stronger and help build antibodies to prevent infectious diseases. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get the disease.

### How do mRNA vaccines work?

mRNA vaccines are different from other vaccines because they don't contain any weakened or dead virus.

mRNA vaccines send messages to your cells to teach them how to make a harmless protein similar to the one found on the virus. Once this protein is made, it tells your immune system to make antibodies against COVID-19 as if you had the virus. These antibodies give your body a head start in fighting the infection if COVID-19 ever tries to enter your body.

After the antibodies are made, your body gets rid of the mRNA and protein naturally. There is no chance of the mRNA touching or changing your DNA. There is also no chance of getting COVID-19 from the vaccine because there is no virus inside it.

### How is the vaccine given?

mRNA vaccines are given as **two** doses into the upper muscle of the arm. It is recommended that doses of Pfizer-BioNTech are given 3-16 weeks apart, and doses of Moderna are given 4-16 weeks apart. If the second dose is delayed past the recommended timeframe, the second dose should still be given as soon as possible. You do not have to restart the vaccine series if this happens.

### Who can get the vaccine?

Both the Moderna Spikevax and Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty vaccine are safe and effective for the majority of the population, including those who are pregnant, breastfeeding, immunocompromised, or who have an autoimmune condition.

A Health Care Provider will consult with you regarding your personal health prior to administering an immunization.

### Who should NOT get the vaccine?

Both mRNA vaccines are safe and effective for the majority of the population. If you have any concerns regarding the vaccine, consult with a Health Care Provider prior to receiving an immunization.

Those who developed severe allergic reactions to a prior dose of mRNA or to an ingredient in the vaccine should avoid getting the vaccine until they consult a healthcare provider.

### What are possible side effects from the vaccine?

Vaccines, like all medications, can have side effects. Side effects to the COVID-19 vaccine are usually mild or moderate, and should last only a few days. Side effects of the vaccine may be more common after the second dose.

Some people may notice a reaction around the part of the arm where the vaccine was given. The reaction may happen 1-2 days after vaccination, or a week or more after vaccination. In both situations, the reaction should only last a few days.

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Common side effects to the COVID-19 vaccine are:

- Headache
- Muscle or joint pain
- Chills
- Fever
- Pain, redness or swelling where the vaccine was given
- Swelling and tenderness in the arm pit
- Fatigue

To help with side effects, use a cool cloth over the sore arm and ask your health care provider if you can take medication like acetaminophen (Tylenol) for pain and fever.

Very rare cases of inflammation of the heart (myocarditis and pericarditis) have been reported after getting mRNA vaccines, mostly after the second dose in males under 30 years of age. Symptoms usually appear within the week after receiving the vaccine and are usually mild and treated with medication and rest. If you or your child experience any shortness of breath, chest pain or a feeling of a rapid or abnormal heart rhythm (palpitations), contact your health care provider immediately.

### What should I do after getting the vaccine?

It's very important to stick around for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine in the very rare case you have a severe reaction. A severe reaction sometimes shows up as **hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips.**

If a reaction happens after you leave the site of vaccination – call 9-1-1 or your local community health centre, or go to the emergency department right away.

### Reporting adverse events following immunization

If you have concerns about any symptoms you develop after getting the vaccine, contact your health care provider. To report a potential adverse event after getting the COVID-19 vaccine, contact your health care provider or a nurse at your local public health unit or community health centre.

### Do I need a booster dose?

Booster doses increase immunity and are being offered after a minimum of six (6) months following a resident's second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. A COVID booster is recommended because over time, the protection you generated from the first two doses may be waning. The booster is administered to help people maintain their level of immunity for longer.

### Do I need to keep up with public health measures after getting vaccinated?

Whether you are vaccinated or not, everyone should keep up with things like:

- Washing your hands often
- Keeping physical distance from others
- Wearing non-medical masks when physical distancing isn't possible
- Keeping your circle small
- Cleaning and disinfecting your home regularly
- Staying home when you're sick
- Getting tested when you have symptoms