

# COVID-19 Update

For more information:  
[Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus)

Information for Indigenous communities:  
[Canada.ca/coronavirus-info-indigenous](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus-info-indigenous)



## INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA – Ontario Region Vaccine Questions and Answers

January 2021

*Indigenous Services Canada is committed to sharing information on the science of vaccinations with you, your family and your community to help inform your choice to receive the vaccine when it's available.*

*It's important to ask questions so you can see the facts about COVID-19 vaccines for yourself and make the best decision for you, your family and your community.*

*Some information may vary, therefore please speak to your local health care provider.*

### **Q: Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?**

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe. Canada is recognized around the world for its high standards for drug and vaccine review, approvals and monitoring systems; these have not been compromised. Vaccines are tested and authorized with specifications on the age, health status, and other factors of those eligible to receive it.

### **Q. How was the vaccine developed so quickly?**

The term coronavirus refers to a whole family of viruses of which COVID-19 is a part of, officially known as SARS-CoV-2. SARS-CoV (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus) and MERS-CoV (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) emerged in 2002 and 2012 respectively. Scientists began the process of developing a vaccine for SARS-CoV in 2002.

Scientists have been able to develop COVID-19 vaccines quickly thanks to high levels of government funding, by sharing information and working together across countries, and building on technology they already use in existing, successful vaccines.

### **Q. How will the COVID-19 vaccines work?**

Vaccines work by training your immune system to recognize a virus and stop it from making you sick. After you get the vaccine, your body is ready to respond quickly if you are exposed to the virus, more quickly than if you hadn't had the vaccine. The vaccines that have been approved are very effective at preventing people from catching COVID-19 and getting sick.

## **Q: Do I have to pay for the vaccine?**

The vaccine is free. As more vaccines are made and distributed, the Government of Canada expects to be able to offer vaccination to everyone who wants one.

## **Q: Will getting the vaccine be mandatory?**

Vaccination is a personal choice, and like other vaccines in Canada, the COVID-19 vaccine is not mandatory. By getting the COVID-19 vaccine, you will be protected against the novel coronavirus, and you will help prevent the spread of the virus to your family and those in your community who may be more likely to contract it. This includes Elders and older adults; and people with certain medical conditions where infection could cause severe illness and death.

The COVID-19 vaccine will also be an important step to safely resume normal life.

## **Q. What vaccines have been approved for use in Canada?**

After independent and thorough scientific reviews for safety, efficacy and quality, Health Canada has approved two vaccines for use in Canada:

- Pfizer-BioNTech – approved on December 9, 2020
- Moderna – approved on December 23, 2020

## **Q. Why are First Nations a priority this time? Are First Nations being used for vaccine testing?**

Indigenous people are more likely than other Canadians to have health problems and are more at risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19. Canada's National Committee on Immunization has recommended they be a priority for this reason. The vaccines are not being tested on Indigenous people. Large studies have already been done with the vaccines that are approved in Canada, in tens of thousands of people.

## **Q. Who is eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine?**

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is approved for use on people 16 years and older. The Moderna vaccine is approved for use on people 18 years and older.

## **Q. When will the vaccine be available for children?**

The vaccine has not yet been approved for children. Research is underway to determine when children can receive the vaccine.

## Q: What are the potential side effects of the vaccine?

Most people have no side effects at all. However, like any medication, vaccines can cause side effects and reactions, such as:

- pain, redness or swelling where the needle was given
- mild fever
- tiredness
- muscle or joint aches/pain

These mild side effects go away on their own without treatment.

Over a million people worldwide have now had vaccines and there have been very few serious side effects.

## Q. Can someone experience a severe allergic reaction to the vaccine?

Very rarely people can experience an allergic reaction. In those cases, measures are in place to treat those individuals quickly.

Serious allergic reactions can happen in rare circumstances with all vaccines, so it is important to talk to your nurse or doctor if you have ever had serious allergic reactions.

People with allergies to any of the ingredients in a COVID-19 vaccine should not receive that vaccine.

## Q. What are the ingredients in the vaccines?

All of the ingredients in the vaccines are known and are part of the Health Canada review process for vaccines. There are no “unapproved products” in the vaccines.

The Moderna vaccine ingredients are available here:

- <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/moderna.html#a11>

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine ingredients are available here:

- <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/pfizer-biontech.html#a1.1>

Vaccines for other infections like meningitis and polio have prevented millions of people from these diseases and have saved lives.

**Q: Can the vaccine give me the coronavirus?**

The vaccines approved by Health Canada do not contain the virus, therefore, they CANNOT give you the coronavirus.

**Q: If someone has had COVID-19, do they still need to get the vaccine?**

It is still recommended that those who have had COVID-19 and recovered get vaccinated to stay protected. There is some evidence to suggest that natural immunity from a COVID-19 illness may not last very long.

**Q: How many doses of the COVID-19 vaccine will I need?**

One dose of the vaccine may not be enough to provide individual protection. You may need to get a second shot to allow your body to develop adequate immunity. Each vaccine may require a different number of doses on a different schedule. Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, both require two doses 3-4 weeks apart. After two doses, the vaccines are expected to be 94-95% effective.

**Q: Why are some First Nations getting the Moderna vaccine and not the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine?**

Both the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines are equally effective and safe. However, the Moderna vaccine has been set aside for remote and isolated Indigenous communities because it is easier to transport on airplanes into the communities.

**Q: When will the vaccine be available to me, my family and my community?**

The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine is an unprecedented effort that will require the collaboration of multiple organizations that provide services to Indigenous communities in Ontario, including Indigenous Services Canada (ISC).

As COVID-19 vaccines are approved by Health Canada and are made available, at-risk groups, including some members of Indigenous communities, will be among the first groups to receive the vaccine. This is because there will be a limited supply at the beginning. As vaccine supply increases over 2021, it will become increasingly available to lower-risk groups and individuals as well.

More information concerning the vaccine roll-out in your community will be made available through your First Nation leadership as it becomes available.

## **Q: Are First Nations and Indigenous organizations involved in the planning of the vaccine distribution?**

Indigenous organizations, some Indigenous health organizations and Indigenous leaders have been involved in planning for COVID-19 vaccine distribution to Indigenous communities in Ontario.

In fact, Ontario Regional Chief RoseAnne Archibald is a member of the provincial COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force planning for the vaccine distribution in Ontario.

## **Q. What role does Indigenous Services Canada have in the vaccine distribution?**

The Province of Ontario is leading the vaccine distribution; however, ISC Ontario Region also plays a role Nations and is working with partners including community leadership, the Province, public health units, along with Indigenous health authorities and service organizations, to: recruit additional health care providers and support staff, offer training to community health nurses so they are educated about the new vaccines and are certified to do immunizations, assist with community-led vaccination planning, and provide factual and accessible communications that can be used within communities.

## **Q: What else can I do to keep myself and my community safe from COVID-19?**

We don't yet know what level of immunity in the population is sufficient to achieve community immunity. Until that time, everyone should continue to follow public health recommendations:

- minimize the number of people you are physically close to
- don't travel unless absolutely necessary
- stay informed about COVID-19 in your community, region, and province
- wash your hands often,
- stay home when sick, and get tested for COVID-19
- maintain physical distancing,
- wear a face mask as appropriate, and
- keep using good cough and surface hygiene.