

## COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infection of the airways and lungs that can be very **serious**, especially for people who are older or who have other chronic health conditions such as the following:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Lung disease
- Kidney disease

COVID-19 can also be more serious if you **smoke or used to smoke**.

Symptoms of COVID-19 can include a cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, tiredness and the loss of smell or taste. Some people with COVID-19 may have no symptoms or only mild symptoms. Others may need to go to the hospital and may even die.

### How is COVID-19 spread?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, talking and singing. It can also be spread by touching an object or surface with the virus on it and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

### What is the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine?

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines help your body make antibodies that will help protect you from getting sick if you are exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19.

Right now, the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are made by two different drug companies: Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna. The vaccine you get will depend on what is available. No one is able to choose which vaccine they get, but both vaccines are safe and effective.

### When will I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Right now, because the vaccine is new and still being made, B.C. is receiving it a little at a time. The Ministry of Health and the regional health authorities are setting priorities for who needs the vaccine the most. You are part of a high-priority group, but the timeline for your vaccine will depend on needs elsewhere in our health authority area. We expect that you'll receive your vaccine by the end of March. We'll let you know more as soon as we can.

### Can I still get COVID-19 if I get the vaccine?

Right now, the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are the best way to protect you against COVID-19. Research showed that those who got the vaccine were about 95 per cent less likely to get sick with COVID-19.

It's important to remember that no vaccine is 100 per cent effective, so even if you get the vaccine, there is a small chance you could still get COVID-19. Also, after your first dose of the vaccine, it will take about two



weeks for your body to build protection from the virus. If you are exposed to someone with COVID-19 during those two weeks or shortly before getting the vaccine, you could still get COVID-19.

If you do get COVID-19, whether you have been vaccinated or not, we will make sure you get the proper medical care.

### **Do I still need to take special COVID-19 precautions if I get the vaccine?**

Yes. After you get the vaccine, continue to follow the same public health recommendations you're following now:

- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer
- Physically distance
- Wear a mask if you use transit or enter a public building while you're on a pass

### **Can I still go on passes if I get the vaccine?**

Yes, but you'll still need to follow public health guidelines, including distancing, cleaning your hands, and wearing a mask in public buildings and on transit.

### **Do I have to get the vaccine?**

You don't have to get the vaccine, but we strongly recommend it. The vaccines are the best way to protect you against COVID-19, which is serious and sometimes deadly, and which spreads very easily—especially in places where a lot of people live together. When you get the vaccine, you help protect others as well, including those who can't get the vaccine. When it's your turn, we will give you a consent form to fill in. We'll help you make sure you understand all the benefits and all the possible side effects of receiving the vaccine.

### **Is the vaccine safe?**

Yes, the vaccine is safe. Scientists have spent many months testing both vaccines on thousands of people. They have shared their results with public health agencies such as Health Canada, which has approved the vaccines. Health Canada has one of the toughest vaccine screening processes in the world—they approve only vaccines they believe are safe.

### **If I get COVID-19, will the vaccine help me get better?**

A vaccine isn't the same thing as treatment. Vaccines will help prevent you from getting the virus. Treatment helps people who have already tested positive for COVID-19.

### **What happens if I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

We'll clean your arm with some alcohol, and inject the vaccine into the muscle in your upper arm. This is the first of two doses of the vaccine. The first dose will offer a lot of protection after about two weeks of getting it, but for the vaccine to be most effective, you'll need the second dose later on.



### **Will there be side effects from the vaccine?**

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get COVID-19. Some people experience minor side effects from the vaccine, which means they might feel unwell, sore or uncomfortable afterward. These side effects are mild and generally last one to two days. In the rare case you may need health care because of side effects, we'll provide it.

Remember, the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines don't contain actual virus and cannot give you COVID-19.

### **Are there mental health side effects from the vaccine?**

There are no mental health side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine that we know of. If you do have side effects, we'll make sure you get the care you need.

### **What if I have collapsed or challenging veins?**

Don't worry if you have collapsed or challenging veins. The needle for the COVID-19 vaccine goes into your muscle.

### **Do I have to get the second dose of the vaccine?**

You'll give consent for the second dose of the vaccine when you go to your appointment. We recommend you get the second dose so you have the most protection from COVID-19.

### **When will I get my second dose of the vaccine?**

You'll get your second dose in several weeks. Note that your second dose of the vaccine will be the same kind as the first. You don't need to remember what kind of vaccine you get, or when. It will be tracked for you.

### **What if I complete the program before I get my second dose of the vaccine?**

If you complete the program before your second dose of the vaccine, you will get it from your regional health authority. A staff member will provide you with more information before you leave.

### **Can everyone get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

The vaccine is only available to some people right now, but most people will eventually be able to get it. The vaccine is not approved for kids yet because researchers need to make sure the vaccine is safe and effective for them.

If you have COVID-19 now, you may need to wait to get the vaccine. Talk to health care staff if you have questions.

A very small number of people have allergies to some of the ingredients in the vaccine, and should avoid it. If you have serious allergies, talk to health care staff about whether the vaccine is safe for you.

If you can't get the vaccine right now, you'll still be protected by others who get the vaccine, and by continuing to use the protection you're used to, including distancing, masks and cleaning your hands.