



COVID-19 VACCINES: Q & As

With COVID-19 vaccines currently being administered in BC, many of you will have questions about the vaccine - who gets it and when; is it safe; is it effective and more.

We hope that the following information answers some of those questions as BC's Immunization Plan rolls out across our province.

Please note that the information on this web page is based on updates from the BCCDC,¹ the Provincial Health Officer, and the provincial government.³

WHEN WILL THE GENERAL POPULATION START TO GET THE VACCINE?

- Mass vaccinations begin in April (Phases 3 and 4) and are based on age.



More details on the vaccine roll-out can be found at the BCCDC¹ website.

WHAT IS THE TIMING FOR WHEN I WILL GET MY VACCINE?

The timeline for vaccinations may change depending on vaccine supply. Currently the schedule is as follows:

Phase 2 | February - April

- Priority populations not vaccinated in Phase 1.
- Community-based seniors 80 years or older.
- Indigenous seniors at least 65 years old.
- People aged 69 - 16 who are considered clinically extremely vulnerable.

Phase 3 | April - May

- People aged 79 - 60 (in five year increments).
- Front-line priority workers

Phase 4 | May - June

- Ages 59 - 18 (in five year increments).



WHY IS THE DELIVERY OF VACCINES BASED ON AGE?

- The data referenced by the Provincial Health Officer indicates that the older the person, the greater the risk for severe illness, hospitalization, or death due to COVID-19.
- Older people are also more likely to have chronic health conditions, which increases their risk even further.



HOW DO I KNOW WHEN I CAN BE VACCINATED?

- Information will be widely shared when the time comes for the public to register for the vaccine.
- The latest information on timing and vaccine delivery can be found at the BCCDC¹ website.

WHAT IF I HAVE AN UNDERLYING MEDICAL CONDITION?

People who are 16-69 years of age who are considered clinically extremely vulnerable,² will be eligible for the vaccine during Phase 2. This is due to their high risk for serious illness from COVID-19.

People who are 'clinically extremely vulnerable'² are:

- Solid organ transplant recipients.
- People with specific cancers including of the blood or bone marrow such as leukemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment.
- People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy.
- People with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy.
- People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer.
- People having other targeted cancer treatments that can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors.
- People who have had bone marrow or stem-cell transplants in the last six months or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.
- People with severe respiratory conditions, including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.
- People with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as severe combined immunodeficiency, homozygous sickle cell disease).
- People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection (biologic modifiers, high-dose steroids, AZT, cyclophosphamide).
- People who had a splenectomy (spleen removed).
- Adults with very significant developmental disabilities that increase risk (details to come from the health ministry).
- Adults on dialysis or with chronic kidney disease (Stage 5).
- Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.
- Significant neuromuscular conditions requiring respiratory support.

WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG FOR EVERYONE TO GET VACCINATED?

- Vaccination delivery is a complex undertaking.
- Limited supplies, vaccine storage (sub-zero temperatures), and the two-dose regimen, all need to be considered when planning the roll-out of the vaccine across the province. In the meantime, we ask that British Columbians remain patient, and continue to take measures to reduce the spread of the virus as they wait their turn for the vaccine.

WHO IS NOT APPROVED FOR THE VACCINE AT THIS TIME?

- The vaccines approved so far in Canada have not been tested in children, although clinical trials are now underway for those under the age of 18.
- Vaccines are therefore currently recommended for those aged 18 and over.

This recommendation may change as more evidence on safety and/or effectiveness in this population becomes available.

WHO SHOULD SEEK FURTHER ADVICE BEFORE GETTING THE VACCINE?

It is recommended that the following people consult with their health care provider to discuss if the benefits are greater than the possible risks from the COVID-19 vaccine. People who:

- Have an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment.
- Have an autoimmune disease.
- Are pregnant, may be pregnant or are planning to become pregnant.
- Are breastfeeding.
- Have had a severe allergic reaction to the first dose of the vaccine or any of the ingredients in any of the approved vaccines.

Recommendations may change as more evidence on safety and/or effectiveness in these populations becomes available.



THE VACCINE WAS DEVELOPED SO QUICKLY. IS IT AS SAFE AS OTHER VACCINES?

- COVID-19 vaccines approved in Canada have followed the same extensive testing as every other vaccine. No steps were skipped.
- Faster funding and worldwide collaboration have meant the vaccines were able to be developed much more quickly.
- The clinical trials and safety reviews actually took about the same amount of time as other vaccines.

HOW SUCCESSFUL ARE THE VACCINES IN PROTECTING PEOPLE FROM THE VIRUS?

- Vaccines approved in Canada, requiring either one or two doses, are shown to provide excellent protection against the COVID-19 virus, preventing up to 95% of infections and serious illness.



DO I NEED TWO DOSES OF THE VACCINE?

- Vaccines approved in Canada can require one or two doses, depending on their design.
- If you are receiving vaccines with two doses, make sure you follow up with your second, as it is meant to boost the effectiveness of the first dose for the longer term.

WHAT IS THE TIMING FOR THE TWO DOSES OF THE VACCINE?

- The Provincial Health Officer has announced that BC is extending the time between first and second doses of COVID-19 vaccine to four months.
- This is in light of good news from local and international data showing over 90% protection three weeks after receiving the first dose of the two dose vaccine, which lasts for many months.
- The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) aligns with BC's decision, which frees up 70,000 doses for younger age groups.
- This means everyone can move up the list, with all British Columbian's expected to receive their first dose by the end of June.

WHAT SIDE-EFFECTS CAN I EXPECT AFTER THE VACCINE?

- Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Other reactions include tiredness, headache, fever, chills, muscle or joint soreness, and nausea. These reactions are mild and generally last one to two days.
- These common reactions are not an allergic reaction, which is rare, but signs that your body's immune system is responding – in a good way – to the vaccine.
- If you have concerns about any symptoms you develop after receiving the vaccine speak with your health care provider or call 8-1-1 for advice.

¹ BCCDC	www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine
² Clinically extremely vulnerable	www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support/vaccines#clinically-vulnerable
³ Provincial government	www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support/vaccines