

What to expect after getting a COVID-19 vaccine

Congratulations! You've had the vaccine, and you're maybe wondering "what now"? Here are some answers to commonly asked questions you may be asking at this stage of the immunization process.

How will I remember which vaccine I've received and when I got it?

- An immunization record card will be given to you with important information about the date and type of vaccine you received.
- Bring your **immunization card** with you when you get your second dose.
- The card will also serve as proof of having received the vaccine, which you may need at a later date.
- If you register at healthgateway.gov.bc.ca, you can access a digital version of your COVID-19 immunization record.

How long will it take for the vaccine to start working?

- In answering this question, it helps to understand how vaccines work with your immune system.

- The BCCDC likens the immune system to a light dimmer switch that slowly gets turned up after vaccination as your body creates more and more antibodies. The antibodies fight the virus and are what give you immunity.
- This means that after your first dose it will take two to three weeks for your immune system to create enough antibodies to offer a good level of protection against the virus.
- Even if you get COVID-19 after vaccination, your symptoms are more likely to be mild.
- All COVID-19 vaccines have been shown to be highly effective in preventing serious illness, hospitalization, and death, even after the first dose.

What side effects can I expect from 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 generally mild and only last one to two days.

- These common reactions are not an allergic reaction, 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.

I had the AstraZeneca vaccine but I'm still nervous about blood clots. What is the risk, and what should I look for?

- The risk of having a severe reaction such as a blood clot from the AstraZeneca vaccine is very rare (approximately one out of 100,000), and risks from getting the virus far outweigh those from the vaccine.
- In the very unlikely event you are one of those rare cases, you

should know that the condition is highly treatable.

- Knowing what to look for helps to quickly identify and manage the condition. Symptoms include shortness of breath, bruising, abdominal pain and a severe headache. You should seek medical help immediately if you experience any of these symptoms.

I hardly had any reaction after the vaccine. Does that mean it isn't working?

- A lot of people experience only mild discomfort or no symptoms at all from either shot. If this is the case, you shouldn't worry. Just as some people experience side effects from medications and others don't, people have varied reactions to vaccines.
- We know from clinical trials that COVID-19 vaccines are extremely effective whether you experience side-effects or not.

I've been hearing that the side effects after the second shot are far worse than the first shot. Is that true?

- The side effects from the second shot can be worse than the first. This is because the body recognizes the virus from the first vaccine and is ready to fight it.
- However, it is important to remember that the short and long term risks to your health from COVID-19 are significant, and far outweigh risks from the vaccine.

Is it safe to take over-the-counter medications for side-effects?

Health care professionals recommend taking pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen for side-effects **after** the shot, not **before**.

Do I need to connect with someone to arrange for my second dose?

- No. Your health authority has a record of your immunization date, and will be in touch with you to advise you of time, date, and location for your second dose.
- At this time, you can expect to receive your second dose about eight weeks from your first vaccination.

Do I really need two doses of the vaccine?

- Vaccines approved in Canada require one or two doses, depending on their design. Pfizer, Moderna and AZ require two doses, and the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, soon to be available in BC, requires only one dose.
- There is good evidence that one dose provides a high level of protection. However, it is really

important to follow up with your second shot as the second dose is critical to ensure long-term effectiveness.

- You will not be considered fully vaccinated without your second dose.
- At this time, you can expect to receive your second dose about four months from your first vaccination.

Is there a risk of developing COVID-19 from any of the vaccines?

- It is not possible to get the COVID-19 virus from the vaccine. None of the COVID-19 vaccines currently authorized or in development use the live virus that causes COVID-19.
- It is possible to be infected with the virus just before or just after vaccination and still get sick. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection.

What happens if I contract the virus between the first and second dose?

- It has been reported that some people got the virus after their first dose, but were not sure if they were infected before receiving the vaccine.
- If you develop COVID-19 after the first dose, you should still plan on getting the second dose on schedule, but check with your doctor first.

Can the COVID-19 vaccination cause a positive COVID-19 test?

The coronavirus vaccine cannot cause a positive COVID-19 test. If you test positive for COVID-19 even after being vaccinated, you should treat that positive test as an actual COVID-19 infection.

Can I still get COVID-19 and pass it on to other people once I'm vaccinated?

- We know that the vaccine protects people from getting sick from the virus, but it is possible that you could still carry the virus and be contagious to others even though you have been vaccinated.
- We will learn more as the clinical trials continue, but in the meantime, we'll need to continue wearing our masks and practicing physical distancing.

How long will I be protected from the virus after being vaccinated?

It is not currently known how long protection from COVID-19 lasts after vaccination, but research is ongoing. Public health experts will recommend whether booster shots are needed as we gain more information.

Once I get the vaccine can I stop wearing my mask?

- COVID-19 will become much less of a risk in our communities as more people are vaccinated, and restrictions will gradually be lifted as fewer infections occur.
- In the meantime though, even after getting the vaccine, it will be important for everyone to continue wearing masks and to continue their efforts to stop spread of the virus. This is because, even though the vaccines are highly effective, we still don't know whether they prevent you from spreading the virus to other people.
- We need to ensure the safety of those who have not yet been vaccinated, or who cannot get the vaccine.
- For more information about BC's restart plan, visit the [BC government website](#).

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