

FAQ – For Use Only for First Nation OFF-Reserve/URBAN First Nation/Metis Settlements COVID vaccination

Q: What is the role of Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services (AHS), and Indigenous Services Canada- First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (ISC-FNIHB) in COVID-19 immunization?

Alberta has a strong system in place to provide access to vaccines. Within this system:

- Alberta Health is responsible for COVID-19 vaccine policy setting, purchase, and allocation of the vaccine.
- Alberta Health Services is responsible for administering the COVID-19 vaccine as part of the provincial immunization program, including for urban Indigenous peoples, Métis settlements and First Nations people who reside off-reserve.

For First Nations on reserve,

- First Nations community health staff will administer the pandemic vaccine program unless the community has existing agreements with Alberta Health Services regarding the provision of immunization services.
- AHS may also support the administration of COVID-19 vaccine in other First Nations, upon request.

Q: Who will get the vaccine first?

- For the near future there is not enough vaccine available to offer immunizations to everyone at the same time.
- Vaccines are being distributed through a phased immunization program with amounts, timelines, and process subject to change depending on vaccine supply.

Early Phase 1: December 2020

- Focus on acute care sites with the highest COVID-19 capacity concerns:
 - Healthcare workers in intensive care units
 - Respiratory therapists
 - Staff in long term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) facilities including six facilities on-reserve.

Phase 1A: January 2021

- Respiratory therapists
- Healthcare workers in intensive care units
- Staff in LTC and DSL facilities
- Home care workers
- Healthcare workers in emergency departments
- All residents of LTC and DSL facilities, regardless of age
- Healthcare workers in COVID-19 unit, medical and surgical units
- Paramedics and emergency medical technicians

Phase 1B: February 2021 (timeline subject to change depending on vaccine supply)

- Seniors 75 years of age and over, no matter where they live
- First Nations, Métis and persons 65 years of age and over living on a First Nations or Metis Settlement

Phase 2: April to September 2021

- Work to identify sequencing for Phase 2 groups is underway.

Phase 3: Fall 2021

- Anticipated start of roll-out to the general public.

Q: Why is immunization important?

- Immunization is a personal choice.
- Vaccines help us protect one another. Immunization is the single most effective means of protecting Elders, yourself, your loved ones and the greater community from COVID-19.
- Immunization will help protect individuals who are at greater risk for severe complications, such as:
 - Elders and older adults
 - Residents and staff of long-term care, designated supportive living and seniors lodges
 - Persons with underlying health conditions or co-morbidities
- Without immunization, we have seen that even healthy Albertans are at risk of severe illness and death from this virus.

Q: How were these vaccines developed so quickly?

The mRNA technology in both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines has been in development for over two decades. In addition, the vaccine development process was moved forward through:

- International collaboration among scientists, health professionals, researchers, industry and governments; and,
- Increased dedicated funding.

Q: Are vaccines safe?

Vaccines are safe. To ensure vaccines are safe, there are many processes and standards in place.

- In Canada, new vaccines must go through three phases of clinical trials (studies) before being approved by Health Canada for use in the general public. There are hundreds or even thousands of participants who volunteer to take part in the third phase of the clinical trials. These trials provide crucial information on vaccine safety as well as effectiveness. After clinical trials, Health Canada must review the evidence and approve any vaccine before it is approved for used in Canada.
- Before a vaccine is offered in Canada, Health Canada will ensure that:
 - it's safe,
 - It works,
 - That the benefits of getting the vaccine outweigh the risks of not getting it.

Q: What COVID-19 vaccines have been approved?

So far, two vaccines have been approved by Health Canada: Pfizer which received approval on December 9, 2020 and Moderna which received approval on December 23, 2020.

Q: Will I have to pay for the vaccine?

No, the federal government is paying for all of the vaccines. COVID-19 vaccines are free. As more vaccines are made and distributed, we expect to be able to offer free vaccination to every Albertan who wants one.

Q: What is the main difference between the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines?

Both Pfizer and Moderna have vaccines that are about 95% effective in protecting against the COVID-19 virus. While both these vaccines are effective, the Pfizer vaccine has a few restrictions that make delivering and administering it, particularly in more rural and remote locations, more challenging.

- The Pfizer vaccine must be shipped in special thermal containers stored in specialized freezers that can reach -70 degrees Celsius, while the Moderna vaccine only requires a temperature of -20 degrees Celsius.
- Once thawed a vial of the Pfizer vaccine must be used within five days while the Moderna is stable at fridge temperature for 30 days.
- Both vaccines come in vials containing multiple doses that require mixing before use. They are only able to be used for 6 hours after opening the vial.

Q: How do the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines work?

Both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are called messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) vaccines. These particular vaccines do not contain any actual virus.

Think of these vaccines as a set of instructions sent to your immune system. The instructions show your body what the virus looks like and teaches it how to kill the virus. After your body has produced its defense, the instructions disappear.

Q: Will mRNA change my DNA?

No. Injecting mRNA into a person does not change the DNA of a human cell.

Q: Do the COVID-19 vaccines contain a microchip?

No. There is absolutely no truth to this claim. For a full listing of the vaccine ingredients check out: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17295.aspx>

Q: How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine is given by an injection into the muscle of the arm. For maximum protection against COVID-19 you will need to receive two doses. After injection you will be asked to stick around for about 15 minutes to monitor for any adverse reaction.

To date, it is unknown how often a COVID-19 immunization will be required.

Q: What happens if I don't get the second dose of the vaccine within the recommended timeframe?

The current provincial COVID-19 vaccine dosing schedule recommends the second shot be given 21 to 42 days afterwards. If you don't get the second shot in time, it's recommended that you get it as soon as possible. Even if you get the second shot late, you won't have to repeat the first one.

While you will have some protection after just your first dose, it is very important to complete your second dose to make sure the protection lasts as long as possible.

Q: Can I get the first dose of one vaccine, and get my second dose of a different vaccine?

No. There has not been any research on the interchangeability of these vaccines. The vaccine series should be completed with the same vaccine product.

Q: Is the vaccine safe for pregnant women?

At this time, there is an absence of evidence for the use of COVID-19 vaccine in pregnant individuals. These groups were not included in large enough numbers in the initial trials to provide solid information. Women who are pregnant should speak with their primary healthcare provider or obstetrician about whether the benefits of COVID-19 immunization outweigh the potential risks for the woman and fetus. However, they may still be immunized without a recommendation from their healthcare provider.

Q. Is the vaccine recommended for those who are immunocompromised or have an autoimmune disorder?

At this time, there is an absence of evidence on the use of COVID-19 vaccine in those who are immunocompromised or who have an autoimmune disorder. These groups were not included in large enough numbers in the initial trials to provide solid information. Individuals should talk to their primary healthcare provider or medical specialist about whether the benefits of COVID-19 immunization outweigh the potential risks.

Q: Is there any reason why I should not get the vaccine?

You may not be able to have the vaccine if you:

- have an allergy to parts of the vaccine
- had a severe or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it
- are under 16 years old
- have had another vaccine in the last 2 weeks

Anyone who needs to isolate or quarantine should delay their immunization and follow the relevant public health guidance.

Q: If I previously tested positive can I still get the vaccine?

Yes. You should still be immunized. There is no mandatory waiting period between having COVID-19 disease and being immunized; however, you must have completed your isolation and be feeling better before coming to an immunization clinic.

Q: What side effects can I expect from the COVID-19 vaccines?

Most people who receive the COVID-19 vaccines experience minimal side effects. More common side effects include:

- Pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site (most commonly reported symptom)
- Fever, chills

- Fatigue
- Headache, joint and muscle pain
- Vomiting, diarrhea
- Swollen lymph nodes

Rare side effects include:

- Serious allergic reaction

As with any immunization, unexpected or unusual side effects can occur.

Q: What about children and youth?

Currently it is not recommended that youth under 16 receive the Pfizer vaccine, and youth under the age of 18 receive the Moderna vaccine.

Q: Where can I get more information?

- For More Information Call Health Link at 811
- Go to [ImmunizeAlberta.ca](https://immunizealberta.ca)
- Go to [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca)
- Go to ahs.ca/covidvaccine
- Go to ahs.ca/covidih