

# COVID-19 vaccines - protein-based (age 12 years and older)

## What are COVID-19 vaccines?

COVID-19 vaccines protect against the SARS-CoV-2 virus (also known as COVID-19). The virus causes an infection in the lungs and airways and is a type of respiratory illness. In some cases, the infection can cause problems with other organs or other parts of the body. Go to [ahs.ca/covid](https://ahs.ca/covid) to learn more about COVID-19.

The following COVID-19 vaccines are approved for use in Canada:

- **mRNA vaccines:** Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty Original [Non-Bivalent] and Comirnaty Bivalent) and Moderna (SpikeVax Original [Non-Bivalent] and SpikeVax Bivalent)
- **viral vector-based vaccines:** AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria)
- **protein-based vaccine:** Novavax (Nuvaxovid)

The Pfizer-BioNTech Bivalent and Moderna Bivalent vaccines are available in Alberta. The Novavax vaccine may not be available in Alberta, and its availability is not guaranteed. For information about the mRNA vaccines, read the vaccine information on [ahs.ca/immunize](https://ahs.ca/immunize).

## Who can get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?

Everyone is at risk of COVID-19. You can get a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you are age 12 years or older and you cannot have or do not want an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines are free.

## Do I need a vaccine if I have already had COVID-19?

If you have already had COVID-19, it is not yet known how long your protection will last or how much protection you will have against variants. It is important to get a COVID-19 vaccine even if you have already had the virus.

The vaccine may give you better protection if you wait a while after having COVID-19 and then get a vaccine. How long to wait depends on your health history, the number of doses of COVID-19 vaccine you have had, and your risk of getting very sick from COVID-19.

If you have had COVID-19 in the past, check with your healthcare provider about when to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

## What if my child is getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

Consent for a COVID-19 vaccine for children under age 18 years is provided by a parent or guardian. If a parent or guardian cannot be at the appointment, they can give consent in writing using the consent form at [ahs.ca/VaccineUnder18](https://ahs.ca/VaccineUnder18). In some cases, children under age 18 years may be able to give their own consent.

## How well do COVID-19 vaccines work?

How well the vaccines work against COVID-19 is different for each variant of the virus. COVID-19 vaccines are the best way to lower your risk of getting COVID-19 or getting very sick from it.

The mRNA vaccines give the best protection. The Pfizer-BioNTech Bivalent and the Moderna Bivalent vaccines are the only vaccines available in Alberta made to protect against Omicron variants, which are the strains that are currently spreading. However, all the vaccines work very well to lower your risk of getting seriously ill and needing to be in the hospital.

## What vaccine can I get?

### Primary series

The primary series of a vaccine is the initial number of doses you need to get protection.

It is recommended that you get a bivalent mRNA COVID-19 vaccine for your primary series. If you cannot get or do not want a bivalent mRNA vaccine, you can get the protein-based vaccine, if available, if you are age 12 years or older. Usually you get the same

vaccine for all your doses. If your first-dose vaccine is not available or you cannot have it, you can get a different COVID-19 vaccine for your next dose. Whichever vaccine you get to complete your primary series protects you against COVID-19.

### Booster doses

A booster dose helps to keep you protected for longer after your primary series.

It is recommended that you get a bivalent mRNA vaccine for your booster dose. If you cannot get or do not want a bivalent mRNA vaccine, you may be able to get the protein-based vaccine, if available, if you are age 12 years or older.

Talk to your healthcare provider about which vaccine is best for you.

## How many doses of the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine do I need?

### Primary series

You need at least 2 doses in your primary series of the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine. (If you got a viral vector-based vaccine for a primary series, you need at least 2 doses if you got the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine and 1 dose if you got the Janssen vaccine. These vaccines are no longer available in Alberta.)

For some people, 2 doses may not give enough protection. You may need a third dose to complete your primary series if you have a health problem that weakens your immune system. For example:

- You have had or will have an organ or stem cell transplant.
- You have kidney disease and need dialysis.
- You have acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).
- You take certain medicines that weaken your immune system.

Studies have shown that a third dose may provide better protection for adults with a weak immune system. In children with a weak immune system, an extra dose may also give better protection, but research is still happening to learn more. If you get a 3-dose primary series of the protein-based vaccine, this is considered “off-label use”. This means the vaccine is not licensed (approved for use) in this situation but is supported by vaccine experts.

### Booster doses

You can get up to 2 booster doses of the protein-based vaccine, but if you got a protein-based vaccine as a booster dose on or after September 21, 2022, then no further doses of the protein-based vaccine are recommended. However, you can still get at least 1 booster dose of a bivalent mRNA vaccine, or 2 doses if you are at high risk of severe illness.

## When should I get my booster dose?

You need to wait 6 months after getting your last dose of COVID-19 vaccine or being infected with COVID-19 before you get a booster dose. Waiting 6 months helps the booster dose give you better protection.

If you have had a stem cell transplant or are getting CAR T-cell therapy (a type of treatment for certain cancers), talk to your healthcare provider about when you can get your booster dose.

If you get a booster dose of the protein-based vaccine and it is sooner than 6 months after your last dose, or if you have already had a protein-based vaccine booster dose, or if you are age 12 to 17 years of age, it is considered “off-label use”. Vaccine experts support using the vaccine this way.

Talk to your healthcare provider about when you should get your booster dose. Go to [alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine](https://alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine) to book an appointment for your booster dose.

## Can I get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

Yes, you can get a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. However, research shows that mRNA vaccines are the safest type of COVID-19 vaccines to get during pregnancy. There is more to learn about getting a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine when you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

When you are pregnant, you have a higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine lowers your risk of getting seriously ill from the virus.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it is recommended that you talk to your healthcare provider before getting a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

## Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Go to [ahs.ca/covidvaccine](https://ahs.ca/covidvaccine) to find out where and when you can get a COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines are free.

## Are there side effects from the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?

There can be side effects from the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- redness, swelling, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- headache, feeling tired or unwell
- a fever or chills
- body aches, sore joints, or pain in your legs or arms
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea) or vomiting (throwing up)

At least 1 out of 100 people who got this vaccine reported 1 or more of these side effects. In some cases, it is unknown if the vaccine caused these side effects.

Current information shows that you are more likely to have these side effects after your second dose of the protein-based vaccine.

Research continues to find out more about the risk of side effects after additional doses.

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after your vaccine. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

## What rare events have been reported after getting the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?

There have been very rare reports of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the lining around the heart) shortly after getting the protein-based vaccine. The reported cases were mild and got better with treatment. It is still not known if these events were caused by the vaccine, and research is happening to learn more about the risk of these rare events after getting the protein-based vaccine.

The inflammation can cause shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, or a very fast or abnormal heart rate. Get medical help **right away** if you have any of these symptoms.

It is not known if having a history of myocarditis or pericarditis puts you at higher risk of having these rare events after a COVID-19 vaccine. Talk to your doctor before you get a dose of COVID-19 vaccine if:

- You had myocarditis or pericarditis within 6 weeks of getting a COVID-19 vaccine.
- You have a history of myocarditis or pericarditis and you have questions about getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

Your risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19 is much higher than your risk of having a rare event after these vaccines.

## How can I manage side effects?

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with a fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dose to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

## What vaccine is recommended for people with a weak immune system?

Research has shown mRNA vaccines provide the best protection for people with a weak immune system. Talk to your healthcare provider about which vaccine is best for you.

## What if I had or am getting another type of vaccine?

You can get most vaccines at the same time as, any time before, or any time after the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine. However, certain vaccines have a waiting period. If you had another vaccine in the last 2 weeks, check with your healthcare provider about when you can get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

## Who should not get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?

You may not be able to get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if:

- You have an allergy to any part of the vaccine.
- You had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it.
- You are under age 12 years.

If you have allergies or have had a side effect to this vaccine, check with your doctor or a public health nurse before you get the vaccine.

Although you can get the vaccine if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever, you should stay home until you are feeling better to prevent spreading your illness to others.

Check with your healthcare provider about when you can get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you had COVID-19 in the past.

Be sure to talk to your doctor **before** you get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if:

- You have a weak immune system (because of a medicine you take or a health problem).
- You have an autoimmune disorder (like rheumatoid arthritis or lupus).
- You have had a stem cell or organ transplant.
- You have a history of myocarditis or pericarditis within 6 weeks of getting a dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

## For more information about immunization



Call Health Link at 811



Scan the QR code or go to [ahs.ca/immunize](https://ahs.ca/immunize)