



Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine – Youth age 12 to 17

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COVID-19 in Children and Youth

[COVID-19](#) is a viral infection that mainly affects the lungs. Most children with a COVID-19 infection will have mild symptoms or none at all. Some children can get very sick and may require hospitalization or experience long-term symptoms including feeling tired, trouble breathing, trouble concentrating or muscle aches.

The COVID-19 virus continues to mutate into new variants, including variants of concern that spread more easily and make people sicker. Vaccinating children protects them from serious illness and reduces virus spread within the community. Children can spread COVID-19 to other people, even if they do not have symptoms.

Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine Approved for Children 12 Years of Age and Older

Health Canada approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children 12 years of age and older (must have already had their 12th birthday) after clinical studies showed that it is safe and effective for this age group. The vaccine provided over 90 per cent effectiveness to prevent COVID-19 after two doses among 12 to 17 year olds. The clinical trials indicate youth can develop a strong immune response and get side effects similar to adults.

How the Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine Works

This is a messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine. mRNA vaccines teach our immune system how to make antibodies that protect us from the COVID-19 virus. After vaccination, your body will be able to recognize the real virus and be able to make antibodies to fight the infection. The vaccine does not contain the COVID-19 virus, so you cannot get a COVID-19 infection from the vaccine.

Two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine are required for full protection. It takes at least two weeks after each vaccine dose to build protection. A booster dose may be needed in the future.

Who Can Get the Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine

The vaccine is safe for most youth, including those with a health condition including diabetes, allergies or a weak immune system. It is also safe for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Vaccine Ingredients and Allergies

The vaccine contains lipids (fats), salts, sugars and buffers. It does not contain eggs, gelatin (pork), gluten, latex, preservatives, antibiotics, or aluminum. Allergies to the COVID-19 vaccines are rare. The vaccines are safe, even if you have food, drug or environmental allergies. Speak with your health care provider first if you are allergic to polyethylene glycol (PEG).

Serious allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) are rare. Allergic reactions can be treated and are usually temporary. Get help if you have trouble breathing, or develop hives or swelling in the face and throat.

Side Effects and Risks

About 1 in 5 people have side effects from the vaccine. Most are mild to moderate, and last one to three days. Side effects usually mean that the vaccine is working to build your immune system.



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Common side effects include:

- redness, pain, itching or swelling at the injection site
- fever
- headache
- feeling tired
- muscle aches
- joint pain
- chills
- nausea and/or vomiting

Myocarditis and Pericarditis

- Myocarditis and pericarditis are a type of inflammation in different parts of the heart.
- The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) is monitoring a small number of reports in adolescents and young adults following vaccination. Most cases that occurred were mild and treated with medications and rest.
- Get medical attention if you develop chest pain, shortness of breath, or palpitations after vaccination.
- Vaccination is still recommended as the benefits outweigh the risks.

Delay Vaccination

- COVID-19 vaccines are not given at the same time as other vaccines. If you received another vaccine recently (not a COVID-19 vaccine), make sure that your appointment is at least 14 days after you received the other vaccine. Wait at least 28 days after getting the COVID-19 vaccine to receive another vaccine.
- If you have a fever or any COVID-19 symptoms, wait until you are feeling better before getting vaccinated.
- If you have been told to self-isolate because you tested positive or were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, please reschedule your appointment for a later date, when your isolation period is over.

Consult a Health Care Provider

Speak with your health care provider or allergist before getting the vaccine if you:

- are on medications that weaken your immune system – you may want to time your vaccination with your medications
- had an allergic reaction within four hours after receiving your first COVID-19 vaccine dose
- have severe allergies to any of the vaccine ingredients

Informed Consent to Get the Vaccine

- Youth should talk about the benefits and risks of getting the vaccine with a parent or trusted adult.
- Consent from parents may not be needed for children over age 12 if the young person is capable to make the decision. This means the young person must understand information about the vaccine, why it is being recommended and what will happen if they accept or refuse vaccination.

Continue to Protect Yourself and Others

When enough people are vaccinated, and the number of COVID-19 cases goes down, we will be able to get back to the activities we enjoy. It is important to continue to follow public health measures, such as physical distancing, wearing a mask and washing your hands, until more people are vaccinated.

For more information: Talk to your health care provider or visit toronto.ca/COVID19.

Resource: National Advisory Committee on Immunization. [Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 Vaccines](#).