



# COVID-19 Bivalent Vaccines

July 20, 2023

As of July 7, 2023, the Ontario Ministry of Health recommends:

- Everyone ages six months and older get a COVID-19 bivalent mRNA vaccine as a primary series
- Everyone five years and older wait to get a booster dose until the fall when the respiratory season starts and the virus spreads the most, giving the best protection against the COVID-19 virus

It is important for everyone to [stay up to date](#) with their vaccinations as this is the best protection from becoming seriously sick with COVID-19 and developing [long COVID](#).

## How the Vaccines Work

The vaccines teach our immune system to make antibodies that protect us from COVID-19. The vaccines do not stay in the body for a long time, do not contain the COVID-19 virus and cannot give us COVID-19. It takes at least two weeks after getting the vaccine to be protected. Even if you had COVID-19 or a previous booster, getting vaccinated provides stronger and longer-lasting protection.

### Vaccine safety

The vaccines are safe and recommended for anyone ages five years and older, who are pregnant or breastfeeding, seniors, and anyone with a health condition, such as heart or lung problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, an auto-immune condition, or a weak immune system. People who are taking treatments or have a weak immune system should speak to a health care provider about when to get their booster for the best immune response.

**Primary series** typically means the first two or three doses of an mRNA or another COVID-19 vaccine, to begin a strong initial immune response. If a primary series has been started with an original (monovalent) vaccine, a bivalent mRNA vaccine can be used to complete the series.

**COVID-19 booster** is given after the primary series. It boosts protection that may have decreased over time, even if you had COVID-19 in the past.

**Bivalent boosters are updated vaccines that target** two different strains of COVID-19 (original and the Omicron variant). There are two bivalent boosters – Moderna and Pfizer. Both bivalent vaccines will provide stronger protection against Omicron variants.

## Vaccine Eligibility

- Children ages six months to four years old are not eligible for a booster dose at this time.
- Children ages six to 11 years can get either the bivalent Pfizer-BioNTech or bivalent Moderna. Note: For five-year-olds, the bivalent Pfizer vaccine is the only one available as a booster.
- For people ages 12 to 29 years, it is recommended to get the bivalent Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Youth, 17 years of age or younger, should talk about the benefits and risks of getting the vaccine with a parent or trusted adult.
- People ages 30 years and over can get either the bivalent Pfizer-BioNTech or bivalent Moderna. There is no recommended vaccine preference.

Learn more about [vaccine eligibility](#).



## Vaccine Ingredients and Allergies

The vaccines contain lipids (fats), salts, sugars and buffers. They do not contain egg, 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 a health care provider first if you are allergic to polyethylene glycol (PEG) or tromethamine (Tris).

Serious allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) are rare. Allergic reactions can be treated and are usually temporary. Get medical help if you have trouble breathing or have hives or swelling in the face and throat within four hours of getting the vaccine.

## Side Effects and Risks

Some people may have side effects after vaccination - most are mild to moderate, and last one to three days. Side effects usually mean that the vaccine is working.

### Common side effects include:

- Redness, pain, itching or swelling where the needle was given
- Fever
- Headache
- Feeling tired
- Muscle aches
- Joint pain
- Chills
- Nausea and/or vomiting

If you have a serious reaction to the vaccine or the reaction does not go away after three days, contact a health care provider. Public health keeps track of side effects to ensure vaccine safety.

### Myocarditis and pericarditis:

The risk of myocarditis/pericarditis (inflammation of the heart) is:

- Not common after a booster.
- Lower compared to after the second dose in the primary series.
- Not different between Moderna and Pfizer after a booster dose in adults.

### Stroke

Currently, there is no risk of stroke in individuals who got either the Pfizer or Moderna bivalent vaccines. Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada continue to monitor the safety of all COVID-19 vaccines approved in Canada to ensure the benefits outweigh their risk.

**For more information:** Talk to a health care provider or visit [toronto.ca/COVID19](https://toronto.ca/COVID19).