

November 16, 2023

COVID-19 Vaccines

Risks of COVID-19

[COVID-19](#) is a viral infection that mainly affects the lungs. Most people who get COVID-19 may have a mild illness, but older adults and people with health conditions can get very sick and need to stay in the hospital. COVID-19 can damage the lungs, heart, brain, and other organs. Long-term symptoms may include feeling tired, trouble breathing, trouble concentrating and muscle aches.

COVID-19 continues to change into new variants, which may spread more easily. Vaccination can protect against serious illness and death, even from new variants.

How the Vaccines Work

Everyone aged 6 months and older is currently eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. These vaccines teach our immune system to make antibodies that protect us from the COVID-19 virus. 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 have had COVID-19, getting vaccinated lower the risk of becoming seriously sick from COVID-19. It also protects against [long COVID](#), which is when symptoms last for weeks or months

Benefits of Staying up-to-date with Vaccines

It is strongly recommended that everyone six months of age and older [stay up-to-date](#) with their vaccinations as it lowers the risk of getting, spreading, and becoming seriously sick from COVID-19. The vaccine is safe for people 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 taking treatments or with conditions that weaken their immune system should speak to their health care provider about when to get each dose for the best immune response.

Everyone six months and older are considered up-to-date with their COVID-19 vaccines when they get the fall 2023 COVID-19 dose(s).

- Everyone **five years and older** can receive an updated COVID-19 vaccine six months after their last COVID-19 dose or infection.
- Children six months to four years of age:
 - Who have completed their COVID-19 vaccination (primary) series, can get an updated COVID-19 vaccine dose six months after their COVID-19 last dose or infection
 - Who have not completed or started their COVID-19 vaccination (primary) series, can get their doses at eight weeks apart

- If you have a [weakened immune system](#) and have not been vaccinated for COVID-19 in the past, an additional vaccine dose is recommended to complete your primary series.

Vaccine Ingredients and Allergies

The vaccines contain lipids (fats), salts, sugars and buffers. They do 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), tromethamine (Tris) or polysorbate.

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 needle was given
- Fever
- Headache
- Feeling tired
- Muscle aches
- Joint pain
- Chills
- Nausea and/or vomiting

Myocarditis and pericarditis:

- Myocarditis and pericarditis are types of inflammation in different parts of the heart. It can occur after a COVID-19 infection and can be serious.
- It can rarely occur in adolescents (teens) and young adults after getting a COVID-19 vaccine. Most cases are mild and treated with medication and rest, and get better in a few days.
- For children and young adults aged 5 to 29 years of age, Pfizer is the preferred due to a lower reported rate of myocarditis and pericarditis after vaccination.
- Get medical attention if you develop chest pain, shortness of breath, or racing heartbeat after vaccination.
- Vaccination is still recommended as the benefits outweigh the risks.

If you have a serious reaction to the vaccine or the reaction does not go away after 3 days, contact your health care provider. Public health keeps track of side effects to ensure the vaccines continue to be safe.

Wait to get vaccinated if:

You have COVID-19 or symptoms. To get the best protection you should:

- Wait at least eight weeks from when your symptoms started or you tested positive (if you are getting your primary series); or,

- Wait at least six months (if you are getting a booster).

Learn about when to get vaccinated [after having COVID-19](#).

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