HEALTHHUB FOR
NEWCOMERS

Health Matters! Wellness Matters! Diversity Matters!

COVID-19 Vaccine Questions

October 15, 2021

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About HealthHub

AIMGA is a non-profit organization dedicated to the successful integration of International Medical Graduates (IMGs). While we are a small organization, we are mighty.

Acknowledgements

Edna Ramirez Cerino (Coordinator)

Amna Khalid

Bithika Sen

Gagandeep Kaur

Nashit Chowdhury

Nuruddin Lakhani

Olufunmilayo Oliyide

Samir Gharbi

Sara Abraha

Sarah Jane Ching

Eligibility/Availability

1. What are the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada?

The COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada currently include:

- Pfizer-BioNTech - mRNA
- Moderna - mRNA
- AstraZeneca/ COVISHIELD - viral vector
- Janssen (Johnson and Johnson) - viral vector

2 What vaccine would I get?

Currently in Alberta, the vaccines available are: Pfizer (mRNA), Moderna (mRNA) and AstraZeneca. AstraZeneca is reserved for use as a second dose to those who received AstraZeneca as their first dose. AstraZeneca is also offered to those who have an allergy or those who have had a reaction to an mRNA vaccine, and those who decline the mRNA vaccines. AstraZeneca is only available via Alberta Health Services.

3. Do I have the right to decide which vaccine I get?

Yes, you do have the right to decide which vaccine you get. You might need to wait longer to get the vaccine you desire if it is not readily available. Knowing that all the vaccines are safe and effective, it is highly recommended to get whichever vaccine is available and offered to you.

Alberta Health Services will offer either Pfizer or Moderna depending on availability. Although you may not be able to choose which vaccine is offered, you can always indicate that you have a preference. If you have a preference and you are getting vaccinated at a pharmacy you need to indicate which vaccine you prefer.

4. If I don't want to be vaccinated right now, can I have the chance to get it later or is this my only opportunity?

If you don't want to get vaccinated right now, your opportunity to get vaccinated at a different time will depend on the availability of the vaccine in the future. It is recommended that you get the vaccine when you are offered the vaccine. If there is a particular reason why you do not want to get the vaccine, you are encouraged to have a conversation to discuss your concerns with your healthcare provider and get information from a reliable source. This will allow you to make an informed decision. It is important to remember that the sooner people get vaccinated, the sooner restrictions can be eased, and the sooner we will be able to feel safe in the community.

5. How do I get the vaccine? Where to get vaccinated?

The following are resources to get vaccinated:

1. Pharmacies: Call a participatory community pharmacy; over 259 pharmacies currently offering appointments across the province.
2. AHS Immunization Clinic: Book online; to receive your immunization through a pharmacy or AHS immunization Clinic near you.
3. Call Health Link 811.
4. Living on reserve or on-settlement: book through your local clinic.

These are the usual options to book an appointment. Oftentimes there are arrangements for walk-in or pop up immunization clinics where no appointment is necessary.

Albertans who received AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD for their first dose must call Health Link at 811 to book a second dose appointment. Health Link will ensure the appointment is booked in the correct time frame at an appropriate clinic.

Source: Alberta Health Services- FAQ

Efficacy

6. Which vaccine is the most effective?

Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are about 94 - 95% effective in preventing COVID -19 disease. AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson have efficacy in the 60 to 70% range. However, all the vaccines approved for use in Alberta were close to 100% effective in terms of preventing death and hospitalization in clinical trials.

7. Which vaccine would you recommend?

Canada has very high standards for vaccine safety. Vaccines are tested to make sure that they are safe and effective before they are approved for use. At the same time, Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada continue to monitor for vaccine safety and effectiveness in the population even after a vaccine has been approved. Thus, the recommended vaccine is the one that is available and offered to you.

8.Are the COVID-19 vaccines really effective?

Yes. Vaccination is a crucial way to limit the spread of the COVID-19 infection. Emerging evidence shows that first doses of the vaccines are at least 80% effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death. In addition, longer spacing between doses according to the recommendations does not reduce the protection or duration of immunity. Second doses increase protection and ensure that you are protected for as long as possible.

Information updated on Jul 14, 2021 at Alberta Health Services website.

9. What are the chances of me getting COVID-19 after being vaccinated?

There is a small chance of getting COVID-19 following vaccination because COVID-19 vaccines are not 100% effective at preventing infection with COVID-19. However, being vaccinated will greatly reduce your chance of becoming infected or seriously ill with COVID-19. There is also a small window after vaccination (about 14 days) in which your body is developing the immunity necessary to be protected against COVID-19. During this period one can become infected if exposed to the virus.

10. Can I get sick with COVID-19 from the vaccine?

It is important to note that none of the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada contain the virus that causes COVID-19. Therefore, the COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19.

There is a small window after vaccination (about 14 days) in which your body is developing the immunity necessary to be protected against COVID-19. Thus, even when you would

not get infected by COVID-19 from the vaccine, there is a possibility to get infected with COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination.

11. Are the vaccines effective against variants?

The information provided from clinical research show that the vaccines are effective against variants.

Mutations in the COVID-19 virus are expected, resulting in variant strains. At this time, there are a number of variants of concern circulating around the world including the **Alpha (UK variant, B.1.1.7), Beta (South Africa variant, B.1.351), Gamma (Brazil variant, P.1), and Delta (India variant, B.1.617.2)**.

Scientific evidence shows that available vaccines offer protection against the variant strains.

Both the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines are 33% effective against the Delta variant after the first dose. Efficacy increases to 88% and 60% respectively for Pfizer and AstraZeneca following full vaccination. Studies are still being conducted on the Moderna vaccine and we are monitoring this information closely.

Source: Public Health England

Safety

12. Is it possible to interchange brands of vaccines between doses? For example: If received Pfizer for the first dose can the second dose be Moderna, or vice versa?

According to Alberta Health Services (AHS), both Pfizer and Moderna are mRNA vaccines and work in the same way.

They are about 94-95% effective in preventing COVID-19 disease and they also protect against severe COVID-19 illness, risk of hospitalization or death. These vaccines have similar side effects, with the most common being pain at the injection site, tiredness, or headache.

For those who received an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) as their first dose, they will receive an mRNA vaccine as their second dose.

Those who received AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD as their first dose will be asked to choose to book their second dose with either AstraZeneca or an mRNA vaccine. Second doses of AstraZeneca are only available through AHS.

Two doses of any of the COVID-19 vaccines available in Alberta is considered a safe and protective vaccine series. (International jurisdictions may or may not have the same criteria).

Effective September 1st, a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is being offered to immunocompromised Albertans ages 12 years and older; and to the residents of seniors' long term care facilities.

In addition, The National Advisory Committee on Immunisation (NACI) had published the following recommendation on this topic:

Persons immunized with an mRNA vaccine for the 1st dose should receive an mRNA vaccine for the 2nd dose. If the same mRNA vaccine is not readily available, another mRNA vaccine can be considered interchangeable and should be offered to complete the vaccine series.

If an individual 18 years of age and older has a contraindication to both mRNA vaccines such as hypersensitivity to a component of the mRNA vaccines or anaphylaxis to a previous dose, the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine can be requested as a second dose.

Individuals immunized with the AstraZeneca vaccine for the 1st dose should receive an AstraZeneca vaccine or an mRNA vaccine for the 2nd dose in case there is a problem of supply or a medical condition.

13. What if I am allergic to the vaccine components?

Individuals who have had a serious allergic reaction to another vaccine, drug or food should talk to their health care provider before receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. Health care providers are carefully assessing each case.

When you go to your clinic to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, health care providers assess allergies before giving you the vaccine, they will not give you a vaccine that is unsafe for you to take.

There are two reasons someone cannot get a COVID-19 vaccine (also known as a contraindication):

1. Known severe hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine (like polyethylene glycol – PEG).
2. Anaphylaxis to a previous dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Furthermore, if an individual is 18 years of age and older and has a contraindication to mRNA vaccine such as hypersensitivity to a component of the mRNA vaccine or anaphylaxis to a previous dose, the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine can be requested.

Most people with allergies (e.g., to food, medication or substances not included in the vaccine) or those who have had a previous adverse reaction following immunization will be able to receive COVID-19 vaccine.

Source: COVID-19 vaccine: Question and answers for the public and healthcare practitioners.

14. If I am allergic to Penicillin, is it safe to take the vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccines do not contain any ingredients used in antibiotics such as Penicillin or similar drugs. Therefore, it is safe to get the COVID-19 vaccine in this situation. For in depth discussion, you can contact your healthcare provider, Health Link 811, or AIMGA's Multilingual HealthHub for Newcomers Phone Line: 1-833-906-4357 to talk to an Internationally Trained Physician in your first language.

15. I have a medical condition, is it still safe to get the vaccine?

Most individuals are fit to get immunized with the COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals who have had a serious allergic reaction to another vaccine, drug or food should talk to their healthcare provider before receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. There are two reasons someone cannot get a covid-19 vaccine (also known as a contraindication):

1. Known severe hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine (like polyethylene glycol – PEG).
2. Anaphylaxis to a previous dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Furthermore, if an individual is 18 years of age and older and has a contraindication to mRNA vaccine such as hypersensitivity to a component of the mRNA vaccine or anaphylaxis to a previous dose, the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine can be requested.

If you have any further questions about your specific situation, please contact your health care provider, Health Link 811, or AIMGA's Multilingual HealthHub for Newcomers Phone Line: 1-833-906-4357 to talk to an Internationally Trained Physician in your first language.

16. Is it safe to go to get the vaccine at the vaccination site?

Vaccination sites are following the required public health protocols. Time between appointments is based on recommended guidelines. Therefore, it is safe to go to get the vaccine at the vaccination site. Furthermore, the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada are considered to be safe and effective.

17. If I have peptic ulcer disease, is it okay for me to get the vaccine?

In most underlying health conditions, it is safe to get the COVID-19 vaccines. Having a peptic ulcer disease is not a contraindication to get the vaccine. We encourage you to book your appointment to get the vaccine or go to one of the vaccine walk-in clinics.

If you have any further questions about your specific situation, please contact your health care provider, Health Link 811, or AIMGA's multilingual HealthHub for Newcomers Phone Line: 1-833-906-4357 to talk to an Internationally Trained Physician in your first language.

18. If I have asthma, should I get the vaccine?

It is highly recommended for people who have asthma to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Getting COVID-19 illness for individuals with severe asthma or COPD can be serious, and the vaccines available in Canada are safe and effective against COVID-19 and variants of concern.

If you have any further questions about your specific situation, please contact your health care provider, Health Link 811, or AIMGA's multilingual HealthHub for Newcomers Phone Line: 1-833-906-4357 to talk to an Internationally Trained Physician in your first language.

19. How come the vaccine is ready so fast? Is it safe?

It is important to know that the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada underwent all the phases needed to be developed and approved for use. Given the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, a collaboration among researchers and scientists with support from the government funds expedited the process of clinical trials that included over 40,000 volunteers from different ethnic groups, age groups and gender that led the way for getting approval of the vaccines for use in Canada.

Some of the reasons for the vaccines being developed rapidly are: First, the production started before the end of phase 3 clinical trials. Second, there was a lot of interest in volunteering for the trials that tested the vaccines' effectiveness, which expedited

the process. Researchers often wait many months and sometimes even years to get people to volunteer to be part of trials.

Side Effects

20. What are the long-term side effects of getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

The approved COVID-19 vaccines are still relatively new and they are ongoing studies and monitoring for long-term side effects. At this point there is no evidence of long-term side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines. It is highly recommended to get the COVID-19 vaccines, as infection with COVID-19 itself or one of the variants is known to have serious complications and long-lasting effects.

21. What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Side effects, which tend to be mild and go away in a few days, may include:

- Redness, warmth, swelling, bruising, itching, or soreness in the injection area
- Feeling tired or unwell
- Headache
- Fever or chills
- Body aches or sore joints
- Feeling sick to the stomach (nausea), vomiting (throwing up), or loose stools (diarrhea)
- Swollen lymph nodes

It's important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after the vaccine. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get treatment right away.

Rare side effects after getting the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine: There have been very rare reports of blood clots, low levels of platelets (these help our blood to clot), and bleeding. These events have happened 4 to 28 days after getting the AstraZeneca/ COVISHIELD vaccine.

The risk of these events is about:

- 1 in 55,000 after the first dose
- 1 in 600,000 after the second dose

Research is still ongoing to find out more about the risk of these events after getting the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD vaccine.

There have also been rare reports of Myocarditis in kids and youth post second dose of mRNA vaccine: Myocarditis is the inflammation of the heart muscle, it is a rare side effect that has been reported after receiving a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine. It is a treatable condition, and most people who presented to medical care have responded well to medication and rest.

In the US, the CDC reported myocarditis following mRNA vaccine was most commonly observed after 2nd dose with a rate of 16 cases per million second dose. Most patients were young male and most (at least 81%) had fully recovered of symptoms.

Notes: A case series of 7 children (all male) who received the vaccine and developed myocarditis was recently published. This event, while serious, appears rare, and is treatable. Case occurred 2-4 days after vaccination with chest pain being the common symptom. All 7 children are now recovered.

Source: Provincial Immunization Program, Alberta Health Services

Myocarditis following mRNA vaccine: From webinar 19 to ZERO

NACI

22. What is myocarditis, and is it one of the side effects of mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna)?

Myocarditis is inflammation of the heart muscle whereas pericarditis is inflammation of the pericardium or the outer lining of the heart. Myocarditis and pericarditis often occur together and hence the term myopericarditis.

There have been cases in very small studies looking at patients who developed myocarditis after getting the COVID-19 vaccine. The CDC has received 1200 plus preliminary reports of myocarditis and pericarditis following about 300 million of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Until June 14, 2021, a total of 35 cases of myocarditis/pericarditis were reported to PHAC or Health Canada out of over 25 million doses administered in Canada. 19 cases were female aged 20-78 and the remaining 16 cases were males age 29-70.

Of them 25 cases received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, 6 cases received Moderna vaccine, and 3 cases AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD, and 1 case was not specified.

The myocarditis safety signal was seen 22 times after the first dose and 11 times after the second dose. 2 incidents were not specified. Symptom onset occurred between 5 hours and 94 days.

23. Would I have a reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine?

As individuals, we are unique and it may be difficult to say exactly who may have a reaction or side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines.

There are clinical trials that were conducted with a diverse group of participants, including people of Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino and Native American descent and the COVID-19 vaccines in general have been proven safe. In Canada there are about 5 people out of every 10,000 people vaccinated who have reported one or more adverse events (0.045%). About 0.04% of these are non-serious side effects while 0.006% have demonstrated serious adverse reactions (data until 16 April 2021).

Knowing that side effects tend to be rare, minor, and last only a few days, it can be concluded that the benefits from vaccination are higher than the risk of having a side effect.

Side effects should start to decrease after 24hrs. In some rare situations, you might need to call you family doctor, 811 or 911 based on the side effects that you experience. When you get the vaccine, you will get a list of side effects and alarm signs for your reference.

Here is a video on What to expect after getting a COVID-19 vaccine by one of our Internationally Trained Physicians: https://fb.watch/8dROHdRc6F/

24. Are side effects different between the 1st and 2nd dose of the COVID-19 vaccine?

The effects tend to be more intense after the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine because of the way the immune system responds to it.

If an individual has never been exposed to COVID-19 and gets the first shot of the vaccine, the virus like protein that the vaccine causes the individual's cell to produce (known as the spike protein) is new to the body. Once we receive the vaccine, our body recognizes the protein as an antigen (something foreign), and starts reacting to it with inflammation and begins to develop an immune response. This process happens slowly by naive B and T lymphocytes (AKA memory cells).

In contrast, when we receive the second dose our body is ready to attack the virus because it is already primed by the first dose of vaccine. Armed with antibodies and memory T cells that recognize the viral protein from the first shot, the immune system response tends to be more robust very quickly. This response causes widespread inflammation that can lead to flu-like symptoms. The good news is that this process also creates many more antibodies, which help protect the individual in future.

Each individual's immune system's response to the vaccine will depend on his/her/their medical history and the type of vaccine. Age, gender, body mass, previous immunity, vaccine formulation, and the site of injection all can affect how the immune system reacts to vaccines.

25. What about side effects with people previously infected by COVID-19 and getting the vaccine?

Side effects from people who have had and previous infection by COVID-19 are reported as being more intense in some cases, though they remain short-lived.

AstraZeneca and Blood Clots

26. What happens if I get a blood clot from the vaccine?

While every adverse reaction is unfortunate, it is important to remember that blood clots as a side effect from the AstraZeneca vaccine are extremely rare. The risk of VITT (vaccine induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia) in Canada has been estimated to be approximately 1 per 55,000 doses as of May 8, 2021.

However, as with anyone who receives any medication, including a vaccine, we encourage you to monitor your health and seek immediate medical attention if you experience any health concerns. The rare reports of blood clots or VITT (vaccine induced immune thrombotic thrombocytopenia) happened 4 to 42 days after getting the vaccine.

If you experience any of the following symptoms in the 4 to 42 days after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine, please seek immediate medical attention. Symptoms include:

- A severe headache that does not go away
- Seizure
- Difficulty moving a part of the body

- New blurry vision that does not go away
- Difficulty speaking
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Severe abdominal pain
- New severe swelling
- Pain or colour change of an arm or a leg

After getting any COVID-19 vaccine you will be monitored for 15-30 minutes. You will also get a list of signs and symptoms to look for 3 weeks after vaccination and instructions on when to call 811, your family doctor, or 911.

Source: Alberta Health Services - FAQ

27. Is it safe to get the AstraZeneca vaccine?

AstraZeneca vaccine has been proven highly effective in preventing serious COVID-19 illness and death in adults. The AstraZeneca vaccine will continue to be offered safely for people 18 years of age or older who have an allergy and who have had a reaction to an mRNA vaccine or any other ingredients in the vaccine and those who decline mRNA vaccines.

While every adverse reaction is unfortunate, it is important to remember that the blood clots (VITT) due to the AstraZeneca Vaccine are extremely rare.

To date, Alberta has reported 5 cases of VITT and 1 death. Based on cases identified to date in Canada, the rate of VITT has been estimated at approximately 1 case in 55,000 first doses of vaccine. The rate of VITT after a second dose is not clear yet, but data from the UK suggests it is much rarer than the first doses- roughly 1 case per 600, 000 doses were reported.

Source: Data from Alberta Health Services website

28. How many people got AstraZeneca Vaccine in Canada?

According to the data collected until June 26, 2021, in Canada about 3.60% (1,352,931) of the population have received at least one dose of AstraZeneca, and 0.50% (185,144) of the population is fully vaccinated with AstraZeneca.

Source: Government of Canada (Canada.ca> coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

On May 11, 2021, Alberta stopped giving first doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine. This decision was made to hold the remaining AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine supply for second doses or those who have a contraindication to mRNA vaccines like Moderna or Pfizer. (https://globalnews.ca/news/7850968/alberta-stops-first-doses-astrazeneca-vaccine/amp/)

29. Can the virus in the AstraZeneca vaccine give me COVID-19/ how does it work?

Viral vector vaccines use a harmless virus known as vector virus, an adenovirus, as a delivery system. This vector virus is not the virus that causes COVID-19. Adenoviruses are among the viruses that can cause the common cold. There are many different types of adenoviruses, and many have been used as delivery systems for other vector-based vaccines for decades.

When a person is given the vaccine, the vector virus contained within the vaccine produces the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein. This protein is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19, but it is not the virus itself. This protein will not make you sick as it does not have the capacity to do so, it is not the COVID-19. The spike protein does its job of activating the immune system that will bring protection to your body in the future, and once the process is completed your body destroys the protein.

Through this process, the body is able to build a strong immune response against the spike protein without exposing you to the virus that causes COVID-19.
Source: Canada.ca > coronavirus diseases (COVID-19)

In addition, it is important to know that there are no COVID-19 vaccines approved in Canada that contain COVID-19 itself. There are cases of patients that have been infected while waiting for the immunity to develop, but the vaccine itself does not contain the virus.

30. Alberta discontinued giving the first dose of AstraZeneca vaccine after about 255,000 doses had been administered. For those who have received 1 dose, would they be given 1 dose of another vaccine or 2 doses of another vaccine? How will this work?

Due to the lack of vaccine supply, a decision was made to keep the rest of the AstraZeneca doses for second dose-use and for those who are allergic to the components of the mRNA vaccines. If AstraZeneca supply remains short, the mRNA vaccines are recommended as a 2nd dose for those who can receive them safely. Currently, Albertans who received AstraZeneca vaccine as 1st dose vaccine are able to receive AstraZeneca or an mRNA type vaccine for their 2nd dose. Using any 2nd dose of a Canada approved vaccine different than the first dose has been proven to be safe and effective.

Two doses of any of the COVID-19 vaccines available in Alberta (Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca) is considered a complete, safe and protective vaccine series. (International jurisdictions may or may not have the same criteria).

Second Dose Questions

31. How do I book my second dose appointment?

Everyone born in 2009 or before (turning 12+) can now book their first and second doses at a participating pharmacy, through the AHS online tool or by calling 811.

However, for Albertans who received AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD for their first dose, they must call Health Link to book a second dose. They will have the choice to receive AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD or an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer/Moderna) for their second dose. There are many vaccine clinics as well as pharmacies that can take you as walk-in for COVID-19 vaccine.

32. Why do I need to wait so long to get my second dose?

The time that you need to wait to get your second dose of the vaccine will be dependent on the recommended guidelines and the availability of the vaccine that you are requesting.

Results show that a single dose of the vaccines approved for use in Canada offer at least 80% protection against severe outcomes. However, second doses are needed to get the most long-lasting protection against the virus. Your body will develop the antibodies needed to protect you from COVID-19 infection and produce results similar to those showed in clinical research after getting the second dose of the vaccine.

33. Is the vaccine still effective if I wait 4 months to get the second dose?

Currently in Alberta, anyone who has had a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine 28 days ago or longer will be eligible to receive their second dose. You do not need to wait to be contacted to book an appointment once you become eligible.

There is currently limited information on the effectiveness of receiving a second dose earlier or later than recommended. However, if you do receive a second dose of the COVID -19 vaccine earlier than recommended or later, you do not have to restart the vaccine series. This recommendation will be updated as more information becomes available, and will also consider the supply available in the country.

34. What if I don't want to get a second dose?

It is highly recommended to get the second dose for a two-dose vaccine series, the second dose of the vaccine will ensure that the vaccine is working at its best capacity resulting in the most long-lasting protection against the virus. If you decide to have only one dose (of any of the vaccines that require a second dose – Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca), the protection that you acquire would be limited.

35. What if I cannot get the same vaccine that I had for the first dose, when it is time for me to get my second dose?

Second doses should be received within 3 weeks to up to 16 weeks. At this time, the recommendation for those who received either Pfizer or Moderna is to get an mRNA type vaccine for their second dose. Those who received AstraZeneca as their first dose can get either AstraZeneca for their second dose (through the AHS) or an mRNA type vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna).

36. Is the second dose different from the first dose?

No, there is no difference between the two doses regarding the components of the vaccine.

Post infection Immunity

37. Do I still need to get vaccinated if I already had COVID-19 and I have recovered?

If you had COVID-19, you should still get immunized/vaccinated. There is no mandatory waiting period between having COVID-19 disease and being immunized; however, it is recommended that people wait until they are feeling better. There have been cases of reinfection after recovering from COVID-19 disease. Immunity after infection is known to last approximately 3 months, it does not protect you against COVID-19 variants, and it is also not as strong as the immunity/protection acquired from the vaccine.

Source: Alberta Health Services - FAQ

38. When can I get the vaccine after COVID-19 infection?

There is no mandatory waiting period between having COVID-19 disease and being immunized/vaccinated; however, it is recommended that people wait until they complete their isolation period and are feeling better.

39. Do I need to be vaccinated after getting COVID-19, when and how many doses?

If you had COVID-19, you should still get immunized/vaccinated. COVID-19 positive cases need to be vaccinated as the immunity/protection from infection lasts only for a few months (90 days) and does not cover all the variants of concern.

There is no mandatory waiting period between having COVID-19 disease and being immunized; however, it is recommended that people wait until they are feeling better.

It is recommended to get two doses of the vaccines available in Canada (Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca). You would be considered fully immunized/vaccinated 14 days after your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca). If you have received Johnson and Johnson, at this point in time you will only need one dose.

Note: studies have compared the antibodies produced after getting COVID-19 vs antibodies produced after getting vaccinated. Antibodies after getting vaccinated were higher in quantity and quality.

40. If someone got COVID-19 infection and then had the vaccine, will this person be more protected than those who are fully vaccinated without previous infection exposure?

At this point there are no studies comparing the antibodies and protection that a person would get if this person had a COVID-19 infection and a COVID-19 vaccine as well. The answer to this question remains unknown.

However, studies have compared the antibodies produced after getting COVID-19 vs antibodies produced after getting vaccinated. Antibodies after getting vaccinated have shown to be higher in quantity and quality than those that were produced after getting infected with COVID-19. Therefore, it is highly recommended to those who had COVID-19 infection to get vaccinated as well.

41. How long will the immunity from previous COVID-19 infection last?

It has been shown in clinical research that the immunity acquired from COVID-19 infection is known to last about 90 days. However, there have been reports that suggest possible reinfection as early as 45 days after the first episode of COVID-19 infection.

Post Vaccination Questions

42. How come I still need to follow the restrictions if I got my vaccine?

The risk of getting infected with COVID-19 for fully immunized/vaccinated individuals is very low, however, there is a small risk especially due to the widely circulating COVID-19

delta variant. It is important that you follow the local public health recommendations regardless of your vaccination status as this will help to keep yourself and others safe.

It's expected that these recommendations will change as COVID-19-related hospitalization rates become, and stay, very low. Assuming that the COVID-19 vaccines remain effective against the circulating variants of the virus, this should happen as more people become fully vaccinated.

43. After 2 doses of COVID-19 vaccine, do I still need to follow protective measures and for how long?

Regardless of your vaccination status, you need to continue following local public health recommendations and restrictions. It's expected that these recommendations will change as COVID-19-related hospitalization rates become, and stay, very low. Assuming that the COVID-19 vaccines remain effective against the circulating variants of the virus, this should happen as more people become fully vaccinated.

44. After getting the vaccine, how long will I be immune for?

This is a tough question, and it is hard to predict how long the immunity will last after being fully vaccinated (2 doses for most vaccines except Janssen/ Johnson & Johnson). In April 2021, Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna confirmed that immunity from their mRNA vaccines is still going strong (91.3% and 94% effective, respectively) six months after the second dose.

Researchers and vaccine manufacturers are currently exploring whether or not an additional dose, or a modified version of vaccine will be needed to target the emerging variants of the disease. In the meantime, while much of the world is yet to be vaccinated, our main focus should be on getting vaccines to everyone equitably. On September 1st, 2021, Alberta introduced the 3rd dose of COVID-19 vaccine for those who are residents of assisted care living and immunocompromised.

(Source: GAVI : https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/how-long-does-immunity-last-after-covid-19-vaccination)

45. If I develop COVID-19 symptoms after vaccination, do I have to be isolated?

Yes, you do. Once you get the COVID-19 vaccine (first dose), it will take a few weeks for your body to develop antibodies and you can still get COVID-19 disease during this time. It is very important to follow public health guidelines like face covering, maintaining physical distance, and frequent hand washing and sanitizing even if you have received the vaccine. If you notice symptoms, it is advised to get tested and isolate immediately to prevent spreading disease to others who are close and around you.

- If the side effects start within 24 hours and go away within 48 hours, you do not have to keep isolating and can go back to normal activities. But if you have been told to isolate for other reasons, you must keep isolating.
- If the side effects start after 24 hours or last longer than 48 hours, you should stay home. You can contact Health Link at 811 or use the COVID-19 Self-Assessment for Albertans to make an appointment for a COVID-19 test.
- If you do not get tested for COVID-19, you must stay at home for 10 days from the start of your symptoms or until you no longer have symptoms, whichever is longer.

- If you only have redness, swelling or soreness where you had the needle, you do not need to stay home and away from others.

(Source: https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-primary-care-faq.pdf)

Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

46. Is COVID-19 vaccine safe during breastfeeding?

Yes, COVID-19 vaccine is safe during breastfeeding. There is no need to avoid starting or to stop breastfeeding if you get a COVID-19 vaccine as the vaccine itself does not have the capacity to pass through the breast milk. The antibodies that are formed from either COVID-19 infection or COVID-19 vaccination pass through the breast milk to babies. However, studies in the USA show that the antibodies that pass to babies after vaccination are higher in quantity and are also of a neutralizing type, and can stop the infection.

Note: We can get infected by COVID-19 and our body can make antibodies against different parts of the virus, but these antibodies may not stop the infection completely as the neutralizing antibodies from the vaccines do.

47. Is COVID-19 vaccine safe in pregnancy?

Yes, COVID-19 vaccine is safe in pregnancy as the vaccine itself does not have the ability to pass to the baby through the placenta, the antibodies that offer protection do.

It is best to get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if you are pregnant. Research shows that mRNA vaccines are the safest type of COVID-19 vaccine to get during pregnancy. Therefore, when you book your appointment indicate that you are pregnant, you will not be offered a vaccine that is not safe for you.

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy lowers your risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19. In addition, research has shown that there are no risks of miscarriage, preterm birth, stillborn birth, or congenital anomalies associated with the COVID-19 vaccine.

Pregnant women with COVID-19 are at higher risk for severe disease, hospitalization, intensive care unit (ICU) admissions, and pregnancy complications. The risks associated with COVID-19 for you and your baby are higher if you are not vaccinated.

It is highly recommended to get the vaccine. If you are pregnant and have further questions about getting the COVID-19 vaccine or how to access the vaccine, please talk to your healthcare provider as they have a better understanding of your medical history.

Source: Provincial Immunization Program, Alberta Health Services

48. What are the risks of being infected with COVID-19 if I am pregnant?

If you are pregnant, the risks associated with COVID-19 and serious complications for you and your baby are higher.

- There is evidence that shows that if you are pregnant and have COVID-19 you are at higher risk of being admitted to hospital and developing respiratory (lung) complications that need intensive care (ICU).
- If you are pregnant and have COVID-19 you are more likely to have a premature birth.

Your baby is more likely to be admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

- If you are pregnant and have other health conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or obesity, you have an even higher risk of being seriously ill from COVID-19.

Note: Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or are planning to get pregnant in the next 28 days and have questions about the vaccine.

Source: Alberta Health Services

49. If I am pregnant, is it safe for me to get the vaccine?

Yes, it is safe for women who are pregnant to get the COVID-19 vaccine as the vaccine itself does not have the ability to pass to the baby through the placenta, the antibodies that offer protection do.

It is best to get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if you are pregnant. Research shows that mRNA vaccines are the safest type of COVID-19 vaccine to get during pregnancy. Therefore, when you book your appointment indicate that you are pregnant, you will not be offered a vaccine that is not safe for you.

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy lowers your risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19. In addition, research has shown that there are no risks of miscarriage, preterm birth, stillborn birth, or congenital anomalies associated with the COVID-19 vaccine.

Pregnant women with COVID-19 are at higher risk for severe disease, hospitalization, intensive care unit (ICU) admissions, and pregnancy complications. The risks associated with COVID-19 for you and your baby are higher if you are not vaccinated.

It is highly recommended to get the vaccine. If you are pregnant and have further questions about getting the COVID-19 vaccine or how to access the vaccine, please talk to your healthcare provider as they have a better understanding of your medical history.

Source: Provincial Immunization Program, Alberta Health Services

50. Is it safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, it is safe for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine itself does not have the ability to pass to the baby through the placenta (pregnant women) or through the breast milk (breastfeeding women), the antibodies that offer protection do.

Children

51. Can COVID-19 affect children under 12 years old?

Yes, COVID-19 can affect children of all ages. Some variants of COVID-19, such as the Delta or Epsilon variants, have been recently identified in some countries as being responsible for COVID-19 infection in children under 12 years old.

At this time the Health Canada and CDC have not issued guidance on COVID-19 vaccines for children under 12 years old, as the vaccines have not been approved for use in that age group yet.

Both Pfizer and Moderna have, since March 2021, begun clinical trials of their COVID-19 vaccines in children as young as six months old. With Pfizer expecting first results in July and full results in September, the company said it hoped to see younger children getting vaccinated in early 2022.

Source: https://www.msn.com/en-us/lifestyle/home-and-garden/portion-of-euclid-avenue-closed-as-euclid-police-investigating-fatal-crash/vp-AAMjOFg : "CDC warns of delta variant; concern shifts to children under 12") (https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/delta-variant-spreads-medical-experts-warn-risk-young-children-n1274126 "As delta variant spreads, medical experts warn of risk to young children").

52. What do I do if my child has symptoms? When to seek medical attention?

If your child has a fever, cough, or other COVID-19 symptoms, call their doctor or nurse. They can tell you what to do and whether your child needs to be seen in person or not. If you are taking care of your child at home, the doctor or nurse will tell you what symptoms to watch for. Some children with COVID-19 suddenly get worse after being sick for about a week.

The doctor or nurse can tell you when to call the office and when to call for emergency help. For example, you should get emergency help **right away** if your child:

- Has trouble breathing (e.g unable to speak in sentences due to difficulty in breathing)
- Has pain or pressure in their chest
- Has blue lips or face
- Has severe belly pain
- Acts confused or not like themselves
- Cannot wake up or stay awake

If you have a baby and they are having trouble feeding normally, you should also call the doctor or nurse for advice.

53. Can children younger than 17 years old get the COVID-19 Vaccine?

Yes, at this point in time children in the age range 12-17 years old are eligible to receive the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna).

54. How can I protect children younger than 12 years old from COVID-19?

Since children younger than 12 years old cannot receive the COVID-19 vaccine at this point, the best way to protect them is by getting vaccinated ourselves (as soon as we become eligible to get vaccinated).

Additional measures that we can take and that we can teach them to take are: limit our contacts, avoid crowds and poorly ventilated areas, keep our physical distance with other people, wash or sanitize our hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes, and wear a mask if they are older than 2 years of age. It is important for us to remember that our protection is their protection.

55. How come some children cannot get vaccinated? Is it safe to get my children vaccinated?

Children were not included in the initial clinical trials, for this reason it was not approved for them to get vaccinated in Canada. Now children 12-17 years old have been approved

to get the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines in Canada as this age group has now been included in the Pfizer and Moderna clinical trials and data from the trials has been showing that these vaccines are safe for them. Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have also been approved and used in other countries and no significant side effects have been noticed for the majority of children who received them.

56. Can a minor decide to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

If the minor is competent to make this decision, they might be able to get the vaccine. However, if the minor is alone, without parents at the vaccination site, a consent form should be signed before vaccination.

57. How to manage stress and anxiety related to unvaccinated children going back to school?

It is expected that as parents, students and school staff look forward to schools reopening and the return of many classroom and school activities that they did before the pandemic, such as sports and extracurricular activities; this can also be stress and anxiety provoking.

Currently in Alberta, there are no COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in children under the age of 12 and returning to school unvaccinated exposes them to some level of risk from COVID-19. There are however some strategies that can help cope with this worry and help children cope as well.

Prepare, do not panic

- A lot of information is circulating on the news regarding the coronavirus and how it affects children. Some of the information is true and some may be misinformation. It is recommended to use credible sources of information like: *the Government of Alberta, Alberta Health Services, the Government of Canada, the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Public Health Agency of Canada* for up-to-date and reliable information about illness and how to prevent it. Knowledge and preparation can help reduce feelings of panic and stress.

Talk with your children about the COVID-19 outbreak

- Answer questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child can understand.
- Reassure your child that they are safe. Let them know that it is okay if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn from you how to cope with stress.
- Have focused discussions on preventive actions. Set up and praise healthy hand-washing habits, and maintain regular routines for playtime, meals and other activities.

Other measures you can take include:

- Limiting your family's exposure to news coverage of coronavirus events, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.

- Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.
- Spending time with your child in meaningful activities, reading together, exercising, playing board games.
- **Get vaccinated** when eligible to create a layer of protection for unvaccinated children.

Travel

58. Is it mandatory to get the vaccine before traveling to and from Canada?

Traveling from Canada

Vaccination is not mandatory at this point in time, but testing is. Some countries might have different regulations so you will need to inquiry about them with your airline or the government website of the country you are visiting. It is highly recommended to get vaccinated before traveling but not mandatory.

Returning to Canada

Federal requirement

- Beginning on July 5, if specific conditions are met, fully vaccinated travellers who are permitted to enter Canada will not be required to quarantine or take a COVID-19 test on day 8. In addition, fully vaccinated travellers arriving by air will not be required to stay at a government-authorized hotel.
- To be considered fully vaccinated, you should have received the full series of a vaccine accepted by the Government of Canada at least 14 days prior to entering Canada (Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD , and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson)).
- Fully vaccinated travellers must be asymptomatic and have a paper or digital copy of their vaccination proof.
- Travellers who are not fully vaccinated must continue to adhere to current testing and quarantine guidelines.

Note: Find out if you can enter Canada: https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid/travel-restrictions/wizard-start
https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid/travel-restrictions/covid-vaccinated-travellers-entering-canada#determine-fully

Source: Government of Canada

Returning to Alberta

- The Government of Alberta currently imposes no additional restrictions upon international travellers to Alberta.

Leaving Alberta

- Please check with destination local authorities before leaving Alberta as travellers to other provinces or territories may be subject to additional restrictions.

59. Would a COVID-19 test be sufficient to travel?

No, it would not be sufficient. You need to be free from COVID-19 symptoms, and have proof of a negative COVID-19 test. The rules of each destination country might be different to the Canadian ones. It is recommended for you to verify those rules before traveling.

Find out if you can enter Canada here: https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid/travel-restrictions/wizard-start
https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid/travel-restrictions/covid-vaccinated-travellers-entering-canada#determine-fully

60. If travelling outside of Canada, is it okay to complete your vaccination with whatever vaccine available at your final destination?

Returning to Canada

Federal requirement

- Beginning July 5, if specific conditions are met, fully vaccinated travellers who are permitted to enter Canada will not be required to quarantine or take a COVID-19 test on day 8. In addition, fully vaccinated travellers arriving by air will not be required to stay at a government-authorized hotel.
- To be considered fully vaccinated, you should have received the full series of a vaccine accepted by the Government of Canada at least 14 days prior to entering Canada (Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD , and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson).
- Fully vaccinated travellers must be asymptomatic and have a paper or digital copy of their vaccination proof.
- Travellers who are not fully vaccinated must continue to adhere to current testing and quarantine guidelines.

Note: Find out if you can enter Canada: https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid/travel-restrictions/wizard-start
https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid/travel-restrictions/covid-vaccinated-travellers-entering-canada#determine-fully

61. Would having the vaccine before travelling affect my PCR test?

Having the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada will never alter your PCR test because these vaccines do not contain the COVID-19 virus itself. It is also important to know that the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada **do not** have the ability to give you a COVID-19 infection.

62. If I got fully vaccinated with a vaccine that is not approved in Canada, do I still need to get vaccinated with a Canadian approved vaccine and how long do I need to wait to get the vaccine?

Provincially, Alberta considers all vaccines with emergency authorization by the WHO as being valid. If individuals have received one or two doses of a WHO approved vaccine, but not a Health Canada authorized vaccine, they may still get immunized in Alberta with mRNA vaccine, if they choose.

Myths vs Evidence Based Medicine

63. Would the mRNA vaccine alter my genetic makeup or DNA?

No, the mRNA vaccines do not interact with our DNA in any way therefore they do not have the ability to alter your genetic makeup or DNA. mRNA is the component of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines responsible to give your body instructions to create protection against COVID-19. The cells in your body break down and get rid of the mRNA shortly after they are done using the instructions, leaving no trace of mRNA from the vaccine in your body.

64. Is it true that Pfizer is injecting us with chips to track us and control us?

No, the active ingredient in the mRNA vaccine is the messenger RNA. The Pfizer vaccine also contains other ingredients that include lipids, sugar and salts. None of these

ingredients look like or contain microchips. The vaccine volume that is injected in your body is only 0.3 mL, and so far, no microchip this small to fit into such a volume of fluid has been invented.

65. Are they using us to experiment?

No, the experimental phase had been completed with the respective clinical trials before getting the approval from Canadian health authorities to use the COVID-19 vaccines. Canada is recognized around the world for high standards for vaccine review, approvals, and monitoring systems. Only vaccines that are safe and effective will be approved for use in Canada.

After a vaccine is approved for use, evidence on safety and effectiveness is reviewed by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization to provide recommendations on immunizations for individuals and for public health programs. The vaccines approved for use in Canada continue to be monitored to ensure their safety and effectiveness.

Ethno-Cultural Concerns

66. Would my fast be broken if I get the vaccine (Muslim community)?

As indicated by Muslim faith leaders and health care providers, the vaccine is not a form of nutrition, it won't give you energy. It is a medication, therefore your fast is not going to be affected.

67. Some say the COVID-19 vaccine is the mark of the Antichrist, is that true?

Pandemics are not new to the world even though we are dealing with a different virus. We have been receiving vaccines for long and there is no scientific proof that COVID-19 vaccine is any different than other vaccines. The mechanism may vary but all vaccines help our body to fight against a disease, nothing else. Vaccines are given just like any other injection taken for all kinds of live-saving medicine available and administered to our body for hundreds of years. It does not leave any particular mark on the body.

Other COVID-19 and COVID-19 Vaccine Related Questions

68. What is the comparison of antibody titres after vaccine and after recovery from COVID-19?

Studies have compared the antibodies produced after getting COVID-19 vs antibodies produced after getting vaccinated. Antibodies after getting vaccinated were higher in quantity and quality.

COVID-19 positive cases need to be vaccinated as the immunity from infection lasts only for a few months (90 days) and does not cover all the COVID-19 variants. There have also been reports that suggest possible reinfection as early as 45 days after the first episode of COVID-19 infection.

In April 2021, Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna confirmed that immunity from their mRNA vaccines is still going strong (91.3% and 94% effective, respectively) six months after the second dose.

69. How long does it take to get the swab test result?

It is important that test results are received as soon as possible. Test results are received most times on the same day, usually within 24 hours.

As of October 1, 2020, Albertans 14 years of age can access their COVID-19 lab test results in MyHealth Records at alberta.ca/myhealthrecords.

70. How can COVID-19 cause myocarditis?

Myocarditis can present in a variety of ways. Most people with this diagnosis have zero to mild symptoms and it can rarely present with sudden cardiac arrest. Even if the diagnosis is made it is hard to determine the cause. One of the most common causes of myocarditis is the result of immune system reacting to a viral infection. Common viral triggers include adenovirus, coxsackievirus, influenza, parvovirus B19, and herpes virus, and of course now we can include COVID-19 virus, as well as Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Myocarditis is more common in the ages of 12 to 30 and more common in boys. Common symptoms include chest pain, chest pressure, shortness of breath, fatigue, light-headedness, palpitations, and a sudden loss of consciousness.

Even though COVID-19 is a respiratory virus it can affect the heart in several ways. When COVID-19 causes pneumonia it can damage the lungs, decreasing the amount of oxygen that gets to the heart and making it harder for it to pump blood to the body (which is called demand ischemia). Furthermore, the inflammatory response from the immune system to fight the virus is sometimes excessive. The cytokine storm that we hear about is a cascade of cytokines and chemokines of the immune system that can ultimately damage organs in the body, especially kidneys, brain, and the heart (this when we can have myocarditis). It can also form blood clots in small vessels and further damage the heart.

71. Why do I need to get a vaccine before 90 days after infection with COVID-19?

It has been shown in clinical research that the immunity acquired from COVID-19 infection is known to last about 90 days. However, there have been reports that suggest possible reinfection as early as 45 days after the first episode of COVID-19 infection. It is also important to recognize that the antibodies created after COVID-19 infection do not protect us against the variants of concern, and studies have shown that the antibodies produced after getting the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada are higher in quantity and quality than the antibodies produced after getting a COVID-19 infection. Therefore it is highly recommended for those who had a COVID-19 infection to get vaccinated as soon as they feel better, even if 90 days have not passed from the time that they got infected.

Source: www.cdc.gov, Alberta Health Services

72. What is the difference between the vaccines?

mRNA (Pfizer and Moderna) - Newer type of vaccine that gives instructions (through mRNA) for our cells to make a harmless piece of what is called the ‘spike protein’.

The spike protein is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. Our body creates immunity and memory from this protein so if we get exposed to COVID-19 in the future our immune system would fight the infection and protect us.

Viral vector (AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson) - Vaccine made with older type technology. It uses a modified version of a different virus (the vector) to deliver important instructions to our cells. Our body creates immunity and memory from these instructions so if we get exposed to COVID-19 in the future our immune system would fight the infection and protect us.

It is important to know that the COVID-19 vaccines cannot infect you with COVID-19 or other viruses. These vaccines do not contain the COVID-19 virus itself.

73. Will I need to get a booster dose at this point?

At this time, only 2 doses are recommended for Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca, while one dose is recommended for Johnson & Johnson to complete the vaccine series with some exceptions. On September 1st, 2021 Alberta introduced the 3rd dose of COVID-19 vaccine for the residents of assisted care living facility and immunocompromised patients. Remember, our focus is to get as many people vaccinated as possible at this time to reach community immunity and keep everyone safe. That's the priority.

74. Will we need a booster dose in the future?

On April 1, Pfizer confirmed that immunity from their mRNA vaccine is still going strong (91.3% effective) **six months** after the second dose. Similarly, evidence for the Moderna vaccine shows 94% effectiveness six months following the second dose. This six-month marker is an important milestone and both manufacturers will continue to monitor the effectiveness of their vaccines as the months roll by.

Both Pfizer and Moderna are currently exploring whether or not their vaccines will require boosters or genetic modifications to respond to emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants.

On September 1st 2021, third dose of COVID-19 vaccine was introduced for seniors living in congregate facilities and immunocompromised patients in Alberta.

75. With these new variants, do we have to take the vaccine every year and does it protect us from these variants and upcoming ones and for how long?

The emerging variants are definitely of concern and the jury is still out on whether any further doses will be required. In Alberta, 3rd dose for COVID-19 vaccine is available for the residents at the assisted care living facilities and immunocompromised patients. Researchers and vaccine manufacturers are further looking into this and monitoring the situation. As mentioned before, the priority is to vaccinate as many people as possible at this time.

76. Why are some vaccines one dose and others two doses?

The number of doses required to offer protection to the person who receives the vaccine has shown to be different based on study results. Some vaccines reach the maximum

of efficiency with 2 doses like Pfizer/ Moderna/ AstraZeneca, however others reach their maximum efficiency with 1 dose like Johnson and Johnson.

77. Are all vaccines effective against the new variants?

In Canada the most common variant was the Alpha (B1.1.7) variant, also known as the UK variant, during the third wave, and the first dose of vaccine provided protection up to 73% which reached 91% with the second dose: this is considered as a high percentage of efficacy. We nearly have similar result with the Delta (B.1.617.2) variant, which is now the most commonly circulating variant at this moment.

78. I have hepatitis and was COVID-19 positive 5 months ago, my sense of taste is still lost, is it okay to get vaccinated?

It is important to consider getting vaccinated if you have hepatitis B, C or liver disease. Many people with chronic hepatitis infections have liver injury and underlying conditions that increase their chances of developing COVID-19 or severe disease if they become infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. Researchers consider the vaccine to be safe and effective for people with hepatitis B and C and other liver diseases, such as fatty liver. There is no evidence that the vaccine makes liver disease worse. However, if someone has acute hepatitis then the person should receive the vaccine once the acute condition is resolved. Also, there is no contraindication for receiving vaccines for long lasting COVID-19 symptoms such as loss of taste.

Source: https://www.catie.ca/en/covid-19-faq and https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-primary-care-faq.pdf

79. Who is responsible if I get an adverse side effect?

Like any other medication or other vaccines, there can be side effects from COVID-19 vaccines. These tend to be mild and go away in a few days. It is important to be aware of this information to make an informed decision about the vaccines. Every person is responsible to get COVID-19 information that is reliable, it is recommended to speak with your healthcare provider to talk about your questions related to the vaccine. AIMGA has a multilingual Health Hub for Newcomers Phone Line: 1-833-906-4357 where you can have a conversation with an Internationally Trained Physician in your own language, and the health line 811 is available for you as well. COVID-19 vaccination is highly recommended by Canadian Health Authorities but remains a personal choice.

80. Is it encouraged to continue practicing the public health measures to protect myself?

Public health measures are encouraged to limit the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infectious diseases. The recommendations are as follows:

Practice good hygiene: In addition to getting vaccinated, practicing good hygiene habits can protect you and those around you from spreading COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.

- Stay home if you are feeling sick.
- Wash or sanitize your hands often.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Avoid touching your face.

Gather safely: Gatherings are not recommended at this point. If you are gathering with people you do not know or who are not vaccinated, you can practice these optional precautions to limit the risk of spreading COVID-19.

- Practice physical distancing of 2 metres.
- Wear a mask if it's in an indoor space.
- Sanitize common touch surfaces.

Monitor your symptoms: COVID-19 symptoms

Monitor your symptoms: COVID-19 symptoms are similar to influenza and other respiratory illnesses and can range from mild to severe. Even people with mild symptoms can spread COVID-19 to others.

If you have any symptoms, stay home and take the online assessment to arrange testing.

Source: Government of Alberta

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