



What you need to know about COVID-19 vaccines: Information for people with cancer

Vaccines are safe and they can protect you from serious illnesses like COVID-19.

Health Canada has approved two COVID-19 vaccines made by the drug companies Pfizer and Moderna. These approvals mean that Canadians can get the vaccines once they are available. Health Canada is reviewing other vaccines that may also be approved soon.

People who have or have recently had cancer may have a higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. The vaccine is an important part of protecting people with cancer.

Read this information to learn what is known about the vaccines at this time.

If you have questions about whether the vaccine is right for you, talk to:

- Your cancer care team if you are getting cancer treatment now
- Your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) if you have already finished your cancer treatment

Which people with cancer are most at risk from COVID-19?

The following groups are known to be at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19:

- People with cancers of the blood like leukemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma
- People with lung cancer
- People who were diagnosed with cancer in the last year
- People with cancer who are 65 years or older
- People who have had a stem cell transplant in the last 6 months
- People getting treatments that weaken the immune system, such as chemotherapy and targeted therapies

Talk to your health care team about your risks.

How safe is the COVID-19 vaccine for people with cancer?

The COVID-19 vaccine has been tested on thousands of people and has proven to be safe.

Health Canada only approves vaccines that meet strict safety and efficacy (how well something works) standards. The COVID-19 vaccines have had the same safety checks and testing as any other vaccine that has been approved.

The COVID-19 vaccine has not yet been tested on people with cancer. From studying other vaccines, such as the flu shot, doctors say that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe for most with people with cancer.

You cannot get infected with COVID-19 from the vaccine.

Does the COVID-19 vaccine have side effects?

Serious side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine are very rare. Most side-effects from the COVID-19 vaccine are mild and will go away on their own.

The most common side effects are:

- pain in your arm where the needle was given
- fatigue (feeling very tired)
- headache
- body chills
- muscle aches
- joint pain
- fever (a temperature taken by mouth of 38.3° C (100.9 F) or higher one time or 38.0° C (100.4° F) for at least one hour)
- diarrhea
- vomiting

After you get the COVID-19 vaccine, wait for at least 15 minutes before going home. This wait is to check for side effects or an allergic reaction.

Side effects are more likely to happen after your second dose. If side-effects last for more than 2-3 days, make sure you speak to your health care team.

How is the COVID-19 vaccine given?

The two approved COVID-19 vaccines are given by an injection (shot) into the muscle of your upper arm. The full vaccine is two shots that are given a few weeks apart. Both shots are needed for the vaccine to work.

We will know more details about how future COVID-19 vaccines will be given once they have been approved by Health Canada.

How long does it take for the vaccine to protect against COVID-19?

Both approved COVID-19 vaccines protect you about 7-14 days after you get the second shot of the vaccine.

More studies are needed to know how well the vaccine works for people with cancer. Some people with cancer may not get as much protection from the vaccine, but any amount of protection helps to keep you safe.

When will the vaccine be available for people with cancer?

The government is rolling out a three-phase plan to ensure that people can get COVID-19 vaccines as soon as they are available. Some people with cancer may be able to get the vaccine before some other groups.

Since COVID-19 can cause people with cancer to get very sick, you should talk with your health care team about getting the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is available.

At what point in treatment is the best time for people with cancer to get the vaccine?

Speak to your health care team to decide the right time for you to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Your health care team can help you decide based on:

- your medical history
- the details of your cancer and treatment

Can the COVID-19 vaccine cause an allergic reaction?

There have been reports of people having an allergic reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine. **If you have a severe allergy to anything, speak with your health care team before getting the vaccine.**

For more information about the ingredients in the vaccine and advice for people with severe allergies, look at the following websites:

Ontario Ministry of Health's [Information Sheet on Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
[Health Canada Recommendations for People with Serious Allergies](#)

Keep wearing a mask and social distancing after getting the vaccine

There is still a chance that you can get infected with COVID-19 after getting the vaccine, even if you do not feel sick. You may also still be able to spread COVID-19 to others. As such, it is important to keep:

- Wearing a mask
- Washing your hands
- Keeping 6 feet apart from people you do not live with

To keep everyone safe, keep following public health advice after getting the vaccine.

For more information

Health Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments.html>

Ontario Ministry of Health: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-ontario>

Ontario Government Ethical Framework for COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution:
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ethical-framework-covid-19-vaccine-distribution>