

COVID-19 vaccines – mRNA (age 6 months and older)

What are COVID-19 vaccines?

COVID-19 vaccines protect against the SARS-CoV-2 virus (also known as COVID-19). The virus causes an infection in the lungs and airways and is a type of respiratory illness. In some cases, the infection can cause problems with other organs or other parts of the body. Go to ahs.ca/covid to learn more about COVID-19.

The Moderna SpikeVax XBB.1.5 and Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty XBB.1.5 vaccines are the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines available in Alberta. The Pfizer-BioNTech XBB.1.5 vaccine may not be available at all sites. They are updated mRNA vaccines that help protect you against getting seriously ill from COVID-19, including XBB variants that are currently spreading. For information about the protein-based vaccine, read the information on ahs.ca/immunize.

Who should get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine?

Everyone is at risk of COVID-19. You can get an XBB.1.5 mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if you are age 6 months or older. COVID-19 vaccines are free.

Do I need a vaccine if I have already had COVID-19?

If you have already had COVID-19, it is not yet known how long your protection will last or how much protection you will have against variants. It is important to get a COVID-19 vaccine even if you have already had the virus.

The vaccine may give you better protection if you wait a while after having COVID-19 and then get a vaccine. How long to wait depends on your health history, the number of doses of COVID-19 vaccine you have had, and your risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. If you have had COVID-19 in the past, check with your healthcare provider about when to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

What if my child is getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

Consent for a COVID-19 vaccine for children under age 18 years is provided by a parent or guardian. If a parent or guardian cannot be at the appointment, they can give consent in writing using the consent form at ahs.ca/VaccineUnder18. In some cases, children under age 18 years may be able to give their own consent.

How well do COVID-19 vaccines work?

How well the vaccines work against COVID-19 is different for each variant of the virus. COVID-19 vaccines are the best way to lower your risk of getting COVID-19 or getting very sick from it.

The mRNA vaccines give the best protection. The XBB.1.5 mRNA vaccines and the XBB.1.5 protein-based vaccine are the only vaccines available in Alberta made to protect against the XBB variants that are currently spreading. These updated vaccines will help to lower your risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19 and needing to be in the hospital.

What vaccine can I get?

If you are age 6 months to 4 years, you can get the Moderna XBB.1.5 vaccine.

If you are age 5 years or older, you can get either the Moderna XBB.1.5 vaccine or the Pfizer-BioNTech XBB.1.5 vaccine (if available).

There is no information about how well an XBB.1.5 protein-based COVID-19 vaccine works after getting an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. However, information from the original COVID-19 vaccines shows no safety concerns. It is reasonable to expect the same from the XBB.1.5 protein-based vaccine after an mRNA vaccine, but there is still more to learn. If you have already had an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, information shows that you may get better protection if you continue with an mRNA vaccine rather than getting a protein-based vaccine.

How many doses of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine do I need?

6 months to 4 years with a healthy immune system

If you are age 6 months to 4 years, you need 2 doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, 8 weeks apart. The Moderna XBB.1.5 vaccine can start or complete your 2-dose series.

If you have already had 2 or more doses of a non-XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine, you can get 1 dose of the Moderna XBB.1.5 vaccine at least 3 months after your last dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

5 years and older with a healthy immune system

If you are age 5 years or older, you need 1 dose of an XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine. If you have had non-XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccines in the past, you need to wait at least 3 months before getting your XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine.

Weak immune system

If you have a weak immune system, the number of doses you need depends on your age and how many COVID-19 vaccines you have had in the past.

You may have a weak immune system if:

- You have had or will have an organ or stem cell transplant.
- You have kidney disease and need dialysis.
- You have acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).
- You take certain medicines that weaken your immune system.

If you have a weak immune system:

- You need 3 doses of an XBB.1.5 vaccine if you have never had COVID-19 vaccine of any type and you are age 6 months to 4 years.
- You need 2 doses of an XBB.1.5 vaccine if you have never had COVID-19 vaccine of any type and you are age 5 years or older.
- You need 1 dose of an XBB.1.5 vaccine at least 3 months after your last dose if you have already had 3 or more doses of a non-XBB.1.5 vaccine, regardless of age.
- You need 1 or 2 doses of an XBB.1.5 vaccine to total a 3-dose series if you have already had 1 or 2 doses of a non-XBB.1.5 vaccine, regardless of age.

Studies show that extra doses may give better protection to adolescents and adults with a weak immune system. In babies and children with a weak immune system, extra doses may also give better protection, but research is still happening to learn more. Research has shown mRNA vaccines provide the best protection for people with a weak immune system. Information from the use of the original mRNA vaccines shows that the Moderna mRNA vaccine may provide better protection than the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for people with a weak immune system.

If you have had a stem cell transplant or are getting CAR T-cell therapy (a type of cancer treatment), talk to your healthcare provider about when you can get a dose of XBB.1.5 vaccine and how many doses you need.

Additional XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine dose

People who are at a higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 can get an additional dose of the XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine, including the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

You are at higher risk if:

- You are age 65 years and older.
- You are age 18 years and older and you live in a care facility, like a nursing home.
- You are age 6 months and older and have a weak immune system.
- You are age 6 months and older and are an Indigenous person.

You can get the additional dose at least 6 months from your last XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine dose. If you live in a care facility like a nursing home, you can get the additional dose at least 3 months from your last XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine dose.

Off-label use

“Off-label use” means the vaccine is used differently than the way it was originally approved. Vaccine experts support the following off-label uses for XBB.1.5 mRNA COVID-19 vaccines and have no safety concerns:

- You are age 5 to 11 years and get a dose of Pfizer-BioNTech XBB.1.5 sooner than 6 months after your last dose.
- You are age 5 years and older and get a dose of Moderna XBB.1.5 sooner than 6 months after your last dose.
- You are age 5 years and older and get more than 1 dose of an XBB.1.5 vaccine.

- You are age 6 months to 4 years and have had 1 or more doses of a non-XBB.1.5 vaccine, and you get 2 or more doses of an XBB.1.5 vaccine.
- You are age 6 months to 4 years and have already had 2 or 3 doses of a non-XBB.1.5 vaccine, and you get a dose of an XBB.1.5 vaccine sooner than 6 months after your last dose.
- You get 3 or more doses of the XBB.1.5 vaccine.

Can I get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

While you are pregnant, you have a higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine lowers your risk of getting seriously ill from the virus.

You can get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. There is more to learn about the Moderna XBB.1.5 and Pfizer-BioNTech XBB.1.5 vaccines while pregnant or breastfeeding, but the information from the original mRNA vaccines found no concerns. Research shows that mRNA vaccines are the safest type of COVID-19 vaccines to get while pregnant or breastfeeding.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding and have questions about getting a COVID-19 vaccine, talk to your healthcare provider.

Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Go to ahs.ca/covidvaccine to find out where and when you can get a COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines are free.

Are there side effects from mRNA COVID-19 vaccines?

There can be side effects from mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- redness, swelling, a hard spot, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- feeling tired or have a headache
- a fever or chills
- body aches or sore joints
- feeling stiff
- pain in your arms or legs
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), vomiting (throwing up), loose stool (diarrhea)
- swollen lymph nodes
- swelling or feeling sore in your armpit or groin
- feeling dizzy
- a reduced sense of touch or a feeling of numbness
- a rash or hives

Children age 5 years and younger may also get upset easily, be sleepy, cry, or may not want to eat.

At least 1 out of 100 people who got this vaccine reported 1 or more of these side effects. In some cases, it is unknown if the vaccine caused these side effects.

Current information shows that there is similar risk of side effects after each dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after your vaccine. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms. It is rare to have a serious side effect. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

What rare events have been reported after getting an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine?

There have been very rare reports of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the lining around the heart) within 7 days of getting an mRNA vaccine. Most reported cases were mild and got better with treatment. The inflammation can cause shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, or a very fast or abnormal heart rate. Get medical help **right away** if you have any of these symptoms.

Research has shown that the risk of these rare events after additional doses is lower than the risk after the second dose for any type of mRNA vaccine. Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines have a similar low risk of myocarditis

and pericarditis. Research has shown that children age 5 to 11 years have a lower risk of these events than adolescents and adults. In clinical trials for both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, there were no reports of myocarditis or pericarditis in children age 6 months to 5 years. Research is still happening to learn more about the risk of these events after getting an XBB.1.5 vaccine.

It is not known if having a history of myocarditis or pericarditis puts you at higher risk of having these rare events after a COVID-19 vaccine. Talk to your doctor before you get a dose of COVID-19 vaccine if:

- You had myocarditis or pericarditis within 6 weeks of getting a COVID-19 vaccine.
- You have a history of myocarditis or pericarditis and you have questions about getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

Your risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19 is much higher than your risk of having a rare event after these vaccines.

How can I manage side effects?

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with a fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dose to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

What if I had or am getting another type of vaccine?

You can get most vaccines at the same time as, any time before, or any time after an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, including routine vaccines and the influenza vaccine. However, certain vaccines have a waiting period. If you had another vaccine in the last 4 weeks, check with your healthcare provider about when you can get the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

Who should not get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine?

You may not be able to get the XBB.1.5 mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if:

- You have an allergy to any part of the vaccine.
- You had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it.
- You are under age 6 months.

If you have allergies or have had a side effect to this vaccine, check with your doctor or a public health nurse before you get the vaccine.

Although you can get the vaccine if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever, you should stay home until you are feeling better to prevent spreading your illness to others.

Check with your healthcare provider about when you can get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if:

- You had COVID-19 in the past.
- You are under age 18 years and have a history of multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-C).

Be sure to talk to your doctor **before** you get an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine if:

- You have a weak immune system (because of a medicine you take or a health problem).
- You have had a stem cell or organ transplant.
- You are getting CAR T-cell therapy (a type of cancer treatment).
- You have a history of myocarditis or pericarditis within 6 weeks of getting a dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

For more information about immunization



Call Health Link at 811



Scan the QR code or go to ahs.ca/immunize