

COVID-19 vaccines - protein-based (age 12 years 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 Novavax Nuvaxovid XBB.1.5 vaccine is the COVID-19 protein-based vaccine available in Alberta. It is an updated protein-based vaccine that helps protect you against getting seriously ill from COVID-19, including XBB variants that are currently spreading. For information about the mRNA vaccines, read the vaccine information on ahs.ca/immunize.

Who should get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?

Everyone is at risk of COVID-19. You can get an XBB.1.5 protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you are age 12 years 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?

Children age 12 years and older can get the protein-based 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 12 years and older, you can get the Novavax XBB.1.5 protein-based vaccine.

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 the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine do I need?

Healthy immune system

You need 1 dose of the XBB.1.5 protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you have never had a COVID-19 vaccine.

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

If you have already had an mRNA XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine, you are not eligible for a protein-based XBB.1.5 vaccine.

Weak immune system

Research has shown mRNA vaccines provide the best protection for people with a weak immune system. There is less information available about the use of the protein-based vaccine for people who have a weak immune system. Talk to your healthcare provider about which vaccine is best for you.

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

If you have a weak immune system:

- You need 2 doses of an XBB.1.5 vaccine if you have never had COVID-19 vaccine of any type.
- 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 any COVID-19 vaccine.
- 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 COVID-19 vaccine.

Studies have shown that extra doses may give better protection to adolescents and adults with a weak immune system. In children with a weak immune system, extra doses may also give better protection, but research is still happening to learn more.

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 protein-based COVID-19 vaccine. (The protein-based vaccine is only for those age 12 years and older.)

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 protein-based COVID-19 vaccines and have no safety concerns:

- You have already completed a COVID-19 vaccine series and you get a dose of the XBB.1.5 protein-based vaccine less than 6 months later.
- You have already had 1 or more doses of a non-XBB.1.5 vaccine, and you get 2 or more doses of the protein based XBB.1.5 vaccine.
- You have never had a COVID-19 vaccine before and you get 1 dose of the XBB.1.5 protein-based vaccine as a complete vaccine series.
- You get 3 or more doses of the XBB.1.5 protein-based vaccine.

Can I get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

When 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 a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. However, research shows that mRNA vaccines are the safest type of COVID-19 vaccines to get during pregnancy. There is more to learn about getting a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine when you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it is recommended that you talk to your healthcare provider before getting a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

The protein-based vaccine is available at certain Alberta Health Services public health and community health centres. Call Health Link at 811 to find out where and when you can get a protein-based COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines are free.

Are there side effects from the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?

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

- redness, swelling, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- headache, feeling tired or unwell
- a fever
- body aches, sore joints
- pain in your arm, hand, leg or foot
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea) or vomiting (throwing up)

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 you are more likely to have these side effects after your second dose or additional doses of the protein-based 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 the protein-based 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) shortly after getting the protein-based vaccine. It is still not known if these events were caused by the vaccine, and research is happening to learn more about the risk of these rare events after getting the protein-based vaccine.

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.

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 the protein-based 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 2 weeks, check with your healthcare provider about when you can get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

Who should not get the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine?

You may not be able to get the XBB.1.5 protein-based 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 12 years.

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 the protein-based COVID-19 vaccine if you had COVID-19 in the past.

Be sure to talk to your doctor **before** you get the protein-based 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 (at 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