

COVID-19 protein subunit vaccine

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is the COVID-19 protein subunit vaccine?

The COVID-19 protein subunit vaccine (Novavax) protects against infection from the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19. The vaccine causes your body to produce antibodies that will help protect you from getting sick if exposed to the virus. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

Who should get the vaccine?

The protein subunit vaccine is approved for those 12 years of age and older. More information, including how to register for the vaccine, can be found on the Government of British Columbia's website: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/vaccine/register.

If you had, or may have had, COVID-19 you should still get the vaccine. This is because you may not be immune to the virus or variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 and could get infected and sick again.

How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine is given by injection. If you have had one or more doses of a COVID-19 vaccine you should get one dose of the vaccine. If you have never had a COVID-19 vaccine, you should get 2 doses at least 8 weeks apart. If you have a weakened immune system you may need up to 3 doses depending on your immunization history.

Getting all of the recommended doses of vaccine is your best protection against COVID-19.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received. Be sure to bring your immunization record with you when returning for your next dose of vaccine.

What are the benefits of the vaccine?

Immunization is the best way to protect you against COVID-19 which is a serious and sometimes fatal disease. The vaccine provides strong protection against severe COVID-19 illness, including hospitalization and death. The COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech) provide better protection against infection than other COVID-19 vaccines. When you get immunized, you help protect others as well, including those who are unable to get the vaccine.

What are the possible reactions after the vaccine?

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get COVID-19. The vaccine is not a live virus vaccine and cannot give you COVID-19. Common reactions to the vaccine may include tenderness, soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Other reactions may include tiredness, headache, fever, muscle or joint soreness, nausea and vomiting. These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days. If you have concerns about any symptoms you develop after receiving the vaccine, speak with your health care provider or call **8-1-1** for advice.

Rare cases of inflammation of the heart (myocarditis and pericarditis) have been reported after getting the protein subunit vaccine. Cases have occurred mainly in males 12-39 years of age.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®) can be taken for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye syndrome.

For information on Reye syndrome, see [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. There is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This happens in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine. Symptoms may include hives, difficulty breathing or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this reaction occurs, your health care provider is prepared to treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call **9-1-1** or your local emergency number.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

Who should not get the vaccine?

You should not get the vaccine if you have a serious allergy (anaphylaxis) to polysorbate 80 which is in the vaccine. It is also found in some medical preparations (e.g., vitamin oils, tablets and anticancer agents) and cosmetics.

Speak with your health care provider if you had anaphylaxis after a previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine or if you have had anaphylaxis with an unknown cause.

Are there additional considerations to getting the vaccine?

Speak with your health care provider if you:

- Were diagnosed with inflammation of the heart (myocarditis or pericarditis) by a physician after a previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine without another cause being identified

- Have a history of multisystem inflammatory syndrome following COVID-19
- Have symptoms of COVID-19

If you have a new illness preventing you from your regular activities, you should wait until you have recovered. This will help to distinguish side effects of the vaccine from worsening of your illness.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infection of the airways and lungs caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. Symptoms of COVID-19 can include cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, tiredness and loss of smell or taste. While some people with COVID-19 may have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, others can require hospitalization and may die. Serious illness is more common in those who are older and those with certain chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or lung disease. For some people, symptoms of COVID-19 can last for weeks or longer. The long-term effects of COVID-19 on a person's health are unknown.

How is COVID-19 spread?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, talking, singing and breathing. It can also be spread by touching an object or surface with the virus on it and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

For more information on COVID-19 vaccines, visit BCCDC's COVID-19 vaccine page

www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine.



For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/more/resources/healthlink-bc-files or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.