Pfizer Comirnaty COVID-19 Vaccine

November 25, 2021

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is an mRNA vaccine used to prevent COVID-19. It was approved for use in Canada for people 16 years and older on December 9, 2020. On August 18, 2021, it was announced that anyone born in 2009 could be vaccinated. And on November 19, 2021, a children's vaccine was approved for those between the ages of 5-11.
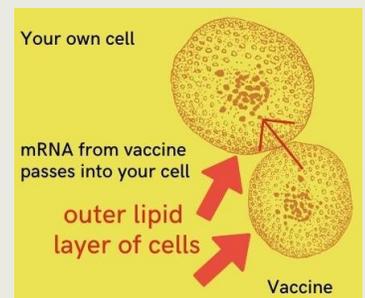
How does an mRNA vaccine work?

RNA stands for ribonucleic acid. RNA inside our cells contains recipes for making essential proteins.

mRNA stands for *messenger* RNA. The Pfizer vaccine uses mRNA to send a new recipe to your cells. The mRNA is inside an envelope made of lipids. The outer lining of the vaccine cell and your own cell is also made of lipids. These are attracted to each other. When they come close together, the envelope carrying the mRNA can easily slide inside your cell.

Your cell uses the new recipe to make coronavirus spike proteins. Your cell shows these spikes on its outer layer. Your immune system reacts because the spikes do not belong. It makes antibodies to fight and destroy them. Your immune system will recognize the spike proteins on the COVID-19 virus and attack it if you are infected.

How is the vaccine given?

It is given by needle into the big muscle of your arm. Anyone 12 and up gets a dose of 0.3ml. Children aged 5-11 receive one third of this dose. Everyone gets two doses in total. Doses are given at least 3 weeks apart. For children, doses are given at least 8 weeks apart to help sustain their immune response.

We are still learning about COVID-19 and the vaccines. This info is accurate as of November 25, 2021.

How well does it work?

Both the children's and adult COVID-19 vaccines give very effective protection against severe illness. Both vaccines are over 90% effective and produce a strong immune response. The vaccine might be less effective in the elderly and those with a weak immune system. Some people will benefit from getting a third dose of the vaccine.

What is in the vaccine?

The vaccine is made up of the medicinal ingredient, salts, fats, and sugars. It does not contain any metals, blood products, or trackers. For a full list of the ingredients, you can visit: https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/pfizer-biontech.html

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

The common side effects include pain at the injection site, body chills, tiredness, and fever. These side effects go away on their own in a day or so. As with all vaccines, allergies or other serious reactions can happen. This is rare.

There have been a few cases of myocarditis and pericarditis reported. This is a condition where the heart muscle becomes inflamed. All of these cases in Canada were treated and people made a full recovering. This is a very rare side effect of the vaccine. The risk of getting this condition is much higher in people who get COVID-19. The benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks.

Health Canada will continue to watch the vaccine closely.

If I am pregnant or breastfeeding, can I get this vaccine?

Yes, you can. If you are pregnant, it is recommended that you get vaccinated. Pregnant people do have a greater chance of becoming severely ill from COVID-19. There is also the risk of other birth complications. The COVID-19 vaccine can protect you and your baby. Speak with your healthcare provider if you have questions.

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It is also safe to get the vaccine while you breast or chestfeed. There is no evidence that the vaccine affects breast or chestfeeding. Some antibodies can be found in breastmilk that may give babies some protection from COVID-19. So, it is wise to get fully vaccinated as soon as you can.

I have allergies. Can I get the vaccine?

You may, but speak with a community health physician before being vaccinated. You may have to wait 30 minutes before leaving the clinic to make sure you are feeling well.

I had COVID-19. Should I get the vaccine?

Yes, you should get the vaccine even if you had COVID-19. But, if you are sick right now, or have been in the past 3 months, talk with your community health team first.

Can I get COVID-19 *after being vaccinated*?

Yes, you can. You do have a much lower risk of getting sick or having severe symptoms. Caution is needed because of the widely spread Delta variant. Get fully vaccinated and practice public health measures to help you to lower your risks of becoming sick with COVID-19 or the Delta variant.

Will the vaccine protect me against variants?

Studies show that Pfizer vaccine is effective against Alpha and Delta variants. But as some variants are easier to spread and easier to catch, public health measures are still needed to help protect yourself.

How long will the vaccine protect me?

Studies show that protection level from mRNA vaccines such as Pfizer can decrease over time. A third dose will help give the extra protection needed variants of the virus like Delta. Third doses are given at least 6 months after the second dose. Third doses are currently offered to the following people: will be offered to people in

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certain high-risk groups. The third dose will help give the extra protection needed against the Delta variant for:

- Indigenous adults
- Healthcare workers and those living and working in congregate settings
- Older adults aged 70 and up
- Anyone who received two doses of the AstraZeneca Vaxzevria or who received the Janssen vaccine

This list may change, so listen for updates from your public health leadership. Speak with your community health team to learn when clinics will be held in your community.

Can I choose which COVID-19 vaccine I want?

The Pfizer Comirnaty vaccine is the only one approved for children aged 5-11 at this time. More vaccines may become available to this group soon.

For anyone 12 and up, there is the Pfizer Comirnaty vaccine and the Moderna Spikevax vaccine. All the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada are effective against COVID-19. Community health teams are going to do their best to match you with the first or second dose you received.

Do you have any questions? Write to us at: ACWinfo@slfhna.com

To learn more:

https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/drugs-vaccines-treatments/vaccines/pfizer-biontech.html

https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/p0329-COVID-19-Vaccines.html

https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/COVID-19_vaccine_info_sheet.pdf

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