

Immunization FAQ

How do I get a COVID-19 shot?

All Albertans 12 years old or older are eligible for a COVID-19 shot.

- You can choose to get the shot at an Alberta Health Services (AHS) centre, or at a pharmacy. To see which pharmacies are giving the shot, please visit the website: <https://www.alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine.aspx>
- First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people who are living on-reserve and are part of the groups currently eligible for the shot will book appointments through First Nations and Inuit Health and their local health centres.
- Everyone else will book their appointments on the website, by phoning 811, or phoning a pharmacy that is giving the shot.

What do I need to bring with me to my appointment?

- Everyone needs to bring an I.D. card that shows their birthday.
- Everyone who is getting their shot at a pharmacy needs to bring their Alberta Health Care card. You do not have to have an Alberta Health Care card to get a shot with AHS.
- If you are 16+ and have a serious health condition, you do not need to bring any proof of your condition. If you are 12-15 and have a serious health condition, you will need consent from your parent/guardian.
- If you are a First Nations, Inuit, or Métis person, you do not need to bring proof that you are in one of these groups. You will need to bring I.D. that shows your birthday.
- If you are a frontline worker, you do not need to bring proof of employment.

Can people without an Alberta Health Care card get a COVID-19 shot? Can people without an I.D. card get a COVID-19 shot?

A person does not need a health care card to get a shot. If a person does not have a health care card they have to make their appointments with Alberta Health Services. They will not be able to get a shot at a pharmacy.

- A person does not need an I.D. card to get a shot, but they do need to show who they are.
- If a person without an I.D. card is the client of a shelter, the shelter can write a letter saying who the person is or can send shelter staff along to the appointment in person.
- If you do not have an I.D. card and are not the client of a shelter, you should contact 811.

Can people who are not Albertan or not Canadian get a COVID-19 shot?

Yes, people who are not Albertan or Canadian can get a shot.

- People who are not Albertan or Canadian have to make their appointments with Alberta Health Services. They will not be able to get a shot at a pharmacy.
- People who are not Albertan or Canadian have to get their shot from Alberta Health Services (AHS) so that AHS can give them a number called a Unique Lifetime Identifier (ULI). The ULI lets AHS keep track of who has gotten the shot. Only AHS gets to see this information, it is not shared with any other authorities.

How are appointments accessible to people who have trouble walking, or have other mobility concerns?

A person who is homebound is anyone who is physically unable to leave their home to go to medical or other personal appointments. Since March 29th, AHS is giving COVID-19 shots at home to people who are homebound.

- The COVID-19 shots will be given to people who are homebound the same way that the flu shot is given every year. AHS Public Health teams or Home Care will give the shot at the person's home.
- People who are already Home Care clients will be contacted by AHS to be offered the shot. They do not need to book an appointment with AHS. If you are a Home Care client and you are not sure about if you are eligible, or have questions about the COVID-19 shot, you should contact your case manager directly.
- If a person is not a Home Care client, but think they may be eligible to get the COVID-19 shot at home, they should contact Health Link at 811. Health Link staff and AHS staff will ask questions to understand if the person is eligible. If the person is eligible, AHS will book their COVID-19 shot at home.
- Only people who are homebound will get the shot at home. Other people living in the same place will have to get the shot at an AHS centre or pharmacy.
- Isolated seniors and people with mobility challenges can get a ride to and from their appointment by calling 211. If you have other accessibility concerns please call 811, or the pharmacy where you booked your appointment.

Are the COVID-19 shots safe?

Shots are important to keep us healthy. They help our bodies recognize and protect us from viruses and bacteria that can make us sick. Health Canada reviewed the shots and found that they are safe, work well, and help to stop us from getting sick from COVID-19.

- The COVID-19 shot is given into your upper arm.
- The COVID-19 shots help our bodies to recognize the COVID-19 virus and protect us from getting very sick from it.
- The shots do not have the COVID-19 virus in them.
- You will not get COVID-19 from the shots.

Is it safe to get a shot if you've already had COVID-19?

Yes, a person who has already had COVID-19 can get the shot.

- The COVID-19 shot is still recommended for people who have already had COVID-19. We do not know how long a person will have protection from COVID-19 after they get better, and the shot protects you better than having had COVID-19.
- The Government of Alberta will track the evidence about how long a person will have protection from COVID-19 after they get better and will give advice as needed.

Is it safe to get a shot if you're pregnant?

Yes, a person who is pregnant can get the shot. Please talk to your doctor if you have any questions.

How do the COVID-19 shots work?

How do the Pfizer and Moderna shots work?

Two of the shots that are offered in Alberta are called Pfizer and Moderna. Both Pfizer and Moderna shots are mRNA shots.

- The mRNA shot teaches your body's cells to make a copy of the COVID-19 "spike protein" which is the same protein that is normally found on the surface of the COVID-19 virus, but not found in our bodies.
- When a person gets the shot, their body's cells will read the instructions from the mRNA and make the harmless "spike protein".
- The person's body will recognize this spike protein is not a normal part of the body and build defenses to fight against it.
- These defenses are then ready to protect the person against the real COVID-19 virus.
- The protein is harmless on its own without the rest of the COVID-19 virus.

How do the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) shots work?

The AstraZeneca and COVISHIELD shots are the same shot made by two different manufacturers. Health Canada has reviewed these shots and found they are very similar. Janssen is similar but only requires one dose.

- The AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD shot uses a virus called a vector to carry the information (genetic code) about the COVID-19 "spike protein". The vector carries information about the same protein that is normally found on the surface of the COVID-19 virus, but not found in our bodies.
- The vector that carries the information about the protein is harmless.
- When a person gets the shot, their body's cells will read the instructions from the vector and make the harmless "spike protein".
- The person's body will recognize this spike protein is not a normal part of the body and build defenses to fight against it.

- These defenses are then ready to protect the person against the real COVID-19 virus.
- The protein is harmless on its own without the rest of the COVID-19 virus.

The Janssen shot is sometimes called the Johnson & Johnson shot. The Janssen shot works like the AstraZeneca shot, but only needs to be given one time instead of two times.

- The Janssen shot uses a virus called a vector to carry the information (genetic code) about the COVID-19 “spike protein”. The vector carries information about the same protein that is normally found on the surface of the COVID-19 virus, but not found in our bodies.
- The vector that carries the information about the protein is harmless.
- When a person gets the shot, their body’s cells will read the instructions from the vector and make the harmless “spike protein”.
- The person’s body will recognize this spike protein is not a normal part of the body and build defenses to fight against it.
- These defenses are then ready to protect the person against the real COVID-19 virus.
- The protein is harmless on its own without the rest of the COVID-19 virus.

How many shots are there?

The AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD, Pfizer, and Moderna shots are given two times.

- It takes about two weeks after the first shot for a person’s body to build some defenses against COVID-19.
- It takes another two weeks after the second shot for a person’s immune system to get better at recognizing the COVID-19 “spike protein” and to develop even more defenses.
- About two weeks after the second shot, the person is considered fully immunized.

The Janssen shot is given one time. A person is considered fully immunized after about two weeks.

When can I get my second shot?

Anyone who gets their first shot after March 10 will get their second shot within four months. This way Albertans can get their first shot quickly.

Some people can get their second shots earlier – if you have had a transplant or who are taking medicines for cancer that make the immune system weak you can get your second shot by calling 811.

- If you are someone with a very weak immune system because you’ve had a transplant or are taking medicines for cancer, you can get the second Pfizer or Moderna shot 21 to 28 days after your first shot.
- If you are someone with a very weak immune system because you’ve had a transplant or are taking medicines for cancer, you can get the second AstraZeneca shot 12 weeks after your first shot.

You will get a reminder from AHS or the pharmacy you received your vaccine at when it is time to book your appointment. You will get the reminder by autodial, phone, or text. Please do not try booking in advance.

Why has the length of time between COVID-19 shots changed?

At first, the second shot was given within 42 days of someone getting their first shot. New evidence shows that The AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD, Pfizer, and Moderna shots protect a person from getting very sick from COVID-19 after the first shot.

- The four month wait for the second shot was recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. They reviewed the information about the shots and found that waiting four months for the second shot is safe.
- Other places like British Columbia and Ontario are also giving people their second shot after four months.
- After you get your first shot, you will get a reminder for the second shot by autodial, phone, or text.
- Real world information from Quebec, British Columbia, Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States shows the first shot of Pfizer and Moderna gives high protection about 70 to 80% of the time for at least two months after a person gets the shot.
- Experience with other shots shows that protection from one shot could last at least six months.
- A person's protection from COVID-19 does not stop at once, but will slowly decrease over time.
- Experience with other shots also shows that more time between shots can help a person's immune system build better defenses.
- The second shot is still important, and we will start offering second shots as soon as we finish offering the first shot to all Albertans.

How much protection do the shots give?

- The AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD, Pfizer, and Moderna shots are very good at protecting people from getting very sick from COVID-19. These shots also protect people from having to go to the hospital to be treated for COVID-19, and from dying from COVID-19.
- Tests of the AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD shot showed that it gives high protection from getting sick at least 62% of the time, and can protect people from going to hospital or dying from COVID-19 about 80% of the time.
- Tests of the Pfizer and Moderna shots showed that they give high protection from getting sick at least 80% of the time.
- Tests of the Janssen shot showed that it gives high protection from getting sick at least 66% of the time.
- The difference between protection people get from AstraZeneca /COVISHIELD and Janssen compared to the Pfizer and Moderna shots may seem like a lot, but it is not so simple.
- What is important to know is the COVID-19 shots are very good at protecting people from getting very sick, having to go to the hospital to be treated for COVID-19, and from dying from COVID-19.
- Health Canada would not approve a shot if they found that it was not good at protecting people from getting very sick.

How long will protection last?

Right now there is not enough evidence to know how long protection will last.

- Health Canada and Alberta Health will track the evidence about how long protection will last and will give advice as needed.
- If more shots are needed in the future, Health Canada and Alberta Health will share this information. How much protection do the shots give against the variants of concern?
- There are different types of the COVID-19 virus, which are called variants of concern. Right now, evidence shows that the shots work against variants of concern.
- There are three variants of concern in Alberta. The most common variant of concern is called the B.1.1.7 variant. It was first found in the U.K.
- The Pfizer, Moderna, and AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD shots give high protection against the variant first found in the U.K. These shots stop the variant first found in the U.K. from infecting a person or from making them very sick if they do get infected.
- Alberta has very few cases of the other variants (the variant first found in South Africa and the variant first found in Brazil).
- There is some evidence that the shots may not work as well to stop a person from being infected with the variant first found in South Africa and the variant first found in Brazil.
- The shots may stop a person from getting very sick if they do get infected with the variant first found in South Africa or the variant first found in Brazil. Having a shot will definitely protect you more than not having a shot.
- There is not enough information about the Janssen shot to know yet how much protection it will give against the variants of concern.
- The Government of Alberta is tracking information about how much protection the shots give against the variants of concern.

What happens if a person chooses not to get the COVID-19 shot?

The Government of Alberta will not make any person get a shot, but getting one is highly encouraged.

- Getting a shot is one of the most important ways to protect people's health. When people get the shots that are recommended on time, the shots are very good at protecting those people from viruses and bacteria that can make us sick.
- We choose to work with people and make sure that people have a choice about getting the shot.
- It is important to help people understand why the shots are good and can help protect people from getting very sick from COVID-19.
- The Government respects Albertans' right to make informed decisions about their health.

- If someone chooses not to get a COVID-19 shot, the Government of Alberta will not have different rules for doing things like going to events, restaurants, or visiting public places. People who choose not to get the shot will have to follow the same rules as people who get the shot when visiting public places.
- Even though the Government will not have different rules for people visiting public places, there may be times when it will matter if a person has had a COVID-19 shot or not, like when travelling internationally or if they are a close contact of someone who has COVID-19. The Government of Alberta will keep track of these situations and give advice as needed.

Do people who have the COVID-19 shot get to follow different rules?

Until most Albertans are protected from COVID-19, people who have gotten a shot will still have to follow all public health measures. People who have gotten a shot will follow the same rules as people who have not gotten a shot.

- About two weeks after a person gets their second shot, they are less likely to become very sick with COVID-19, but we do not know if the shot stops people from spreading the virus to others.
- We must keep looking at the new evidence about how COVID-19 is spread to others before we can safely change public health guidelines. We will let Albertans know when rules for fully vaccinated people can be changed.
- If someone chooses not to get a COVID-19 shot, the Government of Alberta will not have different rules for doing things like going to events, restaurants, or visiting public places. People who choose not to get the shot will have to follow the same rules as people who get the shot when visiting public places.
- Even though the Government will not have different rules for people visiting public places, there may be times when it will matter if a person has had a COVID-19 shot or not, like when travelling internationally or if they are a close contact of someone who has COVID-19. The Government of Alberta will keep track of these situations and give advice as needed.