



The following important information is endorsed by the physicians and healthcare providers at STAR Family Health Team.

To Our Patients and the Citizens of Huron and Perth Counties,

Firstly, we want to recognize that this past year has been a roller-coaster for all of us, to say the least. While some of us have been able to get through it relatively easily, others have struggled tremendously. As your family doctors, we have seen the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on all of you and we know that you look forward to it being over as much as we do.

As many of you know, Health Canada has approved the use of two new vaccines against COVID-19. They are manufactured by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, and represent what many of us consider to be a great feat in modern medicine. Moving from identifying a new virus to having a vaccine against that virus in under a year has taken an incredible coordinated effort. However, we also realize that many of you have questions – good questions – that need to be answered before you can feel confident in these vaccines.

Collectively, we represent over 100 family doctors and primary care providers at the Huron Perth and area Ontario Health Team. Although we do not yet know exactly when the vaccine will be available to our patients, in the coming months we will be doing everything we can to ensure that each of you has access to a COVID-19 vaccine, and we want to use this time to answer any questions you might have. You may be wondering if we really believe in this vaccine, and if we think you should get it. The answer, in short, is yes. You may be wondering if we ourselves will be getting vaccinated. Again, barring any medical reason not to, the answer is absolutely.

Below you will find ten of the most frequently asked questions regarding the two mRNA COVID-19 vaccines and the answers to them. Of note, there are a few other (non-mRNA) vaccines that are currently in development. These vaccines have not yet been approved by Health Canada, but we are monitoring them closely. If and when they are approved and become available, we will critically assess them, just as we have the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech ones. If you have more questions, please visit <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-ontario> or contact your family physician or primary care provider to discuss them.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not over yet, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. Vaccination against this virus is going to be integral to us all being able to move forward. So please, if you have any questions or concerns about it, let us know. In the meantime, we will continue to be here to serve you through our offices and hospitals and hope you will stay safe while continuing to follow public health guidelines.

Sincerely, the Primary Care Physicians of the Huron Perth & Area Ontario Health Team Physician Advisory Council,

Dr. Rob Annis, Listowel Family Physicians

Dr. Paul Gill, HP Pandemic Response Triad Clinical Lead

Dr. Deb Josephson, Bluewater Area FHT

Dr. Nadine Potvin, Clinton Family Health Team

Dr. Sean Ryan, Exeter FHO/South Huron Medical Centre

Dr. Tamra Steinmann, Maitland Valley FHT

Dr. Miriam Klassen, Medical Officer of Health & CEO Huron Perth Public Health

Dr. Danielle Anstett, Stratford FHT

Dr. Kim Gilmour, Happy Valley FHT

Dr. Vanessa Kustec, STAR FHT

Dr. Dan Rooyackers, Huron Community FHT

Dr. Phil Schieldrop, Mitchell Family Doctors

Dr. Stephen Vander Klippe, North Huron FHT

Ten FAQs about COVID-19 Vaccinations

- 1. How effective is the vaccine?** The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna mRNA vaccines have been shown to be over 94% effective at preventing COVID-19. Trials also showed that they both significantly decreased the severity of disease in the small number of people who contracted the virus after receiving the vaccine.
- 2. How long after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine will it take to be immune?** It typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination. This means that you COULD still become infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 for a short time after receiving the vaccine. Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and the Moderna vaccine will require two shots in order to achieve full immunity.
- 3. Can people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past be vaccinated?** Yes. At this time, experts are not sure how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19, and since re-infection is possible, even those who have previously had COVID-19 should be immunized.
- 4. Can the COVID-19 Vaccine cause a COVID-19 Infection?** No. None of the COVID-19 vaccines currently in development use the live virus that causes COVID-19. However, it is possible to develop side effects shortly after being vaccinated, including fever. These side effects are normal and are caused by your immune system responding to the vaccine. They are a sign that your immune system is working and doing what it is supposed to do.
- 5. What are the side effects of the vaccine?** The most frequent reactions are: pain at the site of injection (84.1%), fatigue (62.9%), headache (55.1%), muscle pain (38.3%), chills (31.9%), joint pain (23.6%) and fever (14.2%). These side effects are usually mild to moderate and resolve within a few days. Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have similar side effects. If you experience a significant side effect following vaccination, please let your family doctor or another healthcare professional know.
- 6. Is there anyone who CAN NOT receive the COVID-19 vaccine?** Yes. If you have a KNOWN anaphylactic allergy to the vaccine itself (i.e. you had an anaphylactic reaction after receiving your first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine), or any of the vaccine ingredients, you should not receive the COVID-19 vaccine. If you have had a severe allergic reaction to other vaccines, please talk to your primary care provider or family doctor as they may recommend consultation with an allergist prior to receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. People with other severe allergies (such as foods, latex, etc) may receive the vaccine with an extended period of observation following administration. Also, there are 3 main categories of people who were NOT included in the vaccine trials: 1) children under the age of 16; 2) women who were pregnant or breastfeeding; 3) People who were immunosuppressed due to disease or treatment, or suffering from an autoimmune disorder. However, this does not mean they can't receive the vaccine. We always have to weigh the potential risk versus potential benefit with medical treatments, including vaccines. So, if you fall into one of these categories,

please talk to your family doctor or primary care provider about whether you should have the COVID-19 vaccine.

7. **It seems like these mRNA vaccines were developed VERY quickly. Are they safe?** Yes. In fact, research on mRNA vaccines has been ongoing for over 10 years, and although the COVID-19 vaccines are the first ones to use this technology, the use of mRNA has been successful in other areas of medicine including cancer treatments. Additionally, the vaccines were produced faster than before not because of skipped steps, but because of unprecedented levels of collaboration and funding from around the world.
8. **How was Health Canada able to approve the COVID-19 vaccine so quickly? Did they lower their safety standard for the vaccines?** No. The reason the COVID-19 vaccine was approved so quickly is not because standards changed. It is because Health Canada used a more efficient process for vaccine authorization. The safety requirements in clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccine were as strict as for any other vaccine.
9. **Once I have been vaccinated with the required two doses, can I stop following public health measures like wearing a mask, physical distancing and self-isolating if I become sick?** As of right now, the answer is no. Until the majority of the population is immunized, we will have to continue to practice all the currently recommended public health measures. Other factors, including how the virus is spreading in communities, will also affect how long we must continue with these measures. Bottom line: the more people that get vaccinated, the better!
10. **When will I be able to get my COVID-19 Vaccine?** The difficult decisions about who gets the opportunity to be vaccinated first are made based on Ontario's ethical framework (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ethical-framework-covid-19-vaccine-distribution>). Factors that are considered include population vulnerability and the most effective approaches to preventing the spread of COVID-19. For example, residents and staff in nursing and retirement homes are one of the first priorities. Here in Huron Perth, as part of the Huron Perth and Area Ontario Health Team, organizations from multiple sectors (eg. Family Doctors, Family Health Teams, hospitals, Public Health, EMS, Home Care and Mental Health and Addictions) are working together to develop a plan tailored to our local needs and resources. We fully recognize the importance of making this vaccine available to everyone, and are making every effort to eliminate any barriers to access. We are committed to getting it done as safely and efficiently as possible. So please stay tuned and we promise that we will get you immunized as soon as we can.

Sources:

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2. COVID-19 Vaccines. Centre for Effective Practice. <https://tools.cep.health/tool/covid-19-vaccines/#emerging-evidence-specific-populations-and-allergic-reactions>
3. Statement from the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology. [https://csaci.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PressRelease-Pfizer-COVID-19vaccine-DEC-](https://csaci.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PressRelease-Pfizer-COVID-19vaccine-DEC-14.pdf?utm_source=link.cep.health&utm_medium=urlshortener&utm_campaign=covid-vaccine)
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