

Planning Engagement Sessions on COVID-19 Vaccines and Public Health Measures

.....

Key Messages About COVID-19 Vaccines

Spring 2021



2021: Year of hope

- We left the year 2020 behind having made remarkable progress for Canada and the world with the arrival of the first approved COVID-19 vaccines. We now have a suite of safe and approved vaccines for use in Canada.
- The development, testing and approval of these vaccines in record time under challenging circumstances is truly a remarkable scientific achievement. These accomplishments did not compromise safety in any way.
- The national effort is currently underway to roll out these safe and effective vaccines as quickly as possible to protect everyone in Canada. The Government of Canada expects to have enough vaccines to fully vaccinate everyone for whom vaccines are approved and recommended by fall 2021.
- The Government of Canada recognizes everyone in Canada continues to make great sacrifices to minimize the harmful effects of COVID-19 on their families and communities and to stay safe.

Vaccine safety and monitoring

- A fundamental challenge with this pandemic is that science, evidence and knowledge is evolving and emerging at a rapid pace. All levels of government have to act fast to adapt and evolve vaccine guidance when new evidence warrants it.
- Once a vaccine is authorized for use, Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada closely monitor its safety and how well it works in people. Vaccine safety surveillance and reporting is critical for rapidly detecting and responding to safety issues, ensuring that the benefits of the vaccine continue to outweigh the risks, and supporting vaccine uptake by building public confidence in Canada's immunization programs.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada have increased their monitoring and assessment activities of emerging safety issues. They also increased collaboration and information-sharing with partners here in Canada and around the world, such as the World Health Organization. Companies must also continuously monitor the use of their health products and **report any side effects to Health Canada**.

- 
- Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and provincial and territorial governments will not hesitate to take action if a safety issue is identified, and will inform Canadians about any risks that arise. Information on vaccine safety and adverse events is published weekly on [Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca).
 - For its part, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, an independent committee of experts, provides all levels of government with recommendations for the use of vaccines currently or newly approved for use in humans in Canada.
 - Like any medication, vaccines can cause side effects that are temporary physical responses caused by taking the vaccine. This means that the vaccines are working to produce protection. These mild side effects can include things like redness, and swelling at the injection site. Such events are to be expected, and are very common, and will not necessarily change the approval of a vaccine. Action regarding a vaccine's authorization could happen if a serious reaction after vaccination is investigated and confirmed to be linked to a vaccine.
 - All of Canada's approved COVID-19 vaccines provide a high level of protection against **severe outcomes** of COVID-19.
 - Information on the different COVID-19 vaccines, how they work, how they are given, ingredients, allergies, possible side effects, and safety monitoring is available on [Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca).

Public health measures & personal practices matter

- As welcome as news of the approved vaccines has been, it remains crucial that we all continue to follow the guidance of local public health authorities and to keep up with individual public health practices to protect each other.
- Emerging variants of concern or strains of the virus can spread more easily and some appear to cause more severe illness. Public health measures are critical to prevent rapid spread and increased harm in communities during a time of high COVID-19 activity in Canada.
- Until we learn more about the vaccine's ability to prevent transmission, it is important to follow personal protective practices to protect yourself, others and those at risk of severe diseases or outcomes from COVID-19 regardless of your vaccination status.

- The key public health practices that we know work to prevent COVID-19 spread include:
 - limiting the number of people we have interactions with and the length of those interactions in person, including avoiding large gatherings
 - keep these interactions as few and as brief as possible from the greatest possible distance
 - maintaining individual protective practices of physical distancing, hand, cough and surface hygiene
 - wearing a well-constructed and well-fitting mask both indoors and outdoors where recommended
 - staying home if we are sick, have been exposed to COVID-19, or have any symptoms of COVID-19, even if mild
 - thinking about the risks and reducing non-essential activities and outings to a minimum (avoid all non-essential travel)

Be ambassadors for COVID-19 vaccination

- The Government of Canada's website Canada.ca/coronavirus has information on the latest approved vaccines (e.g., side effects, approved ages, etc.) and information resources to help you share credible information with your friends, family and communities.
- The Government of Canada also launched the **"My Why" social media campaign** to increase vaccine uptake through storytelling and user-generated content. We want to encourage everyone in Canada to help spread the news of personal vaccination stories using the hashtags: #MyWhy and #COVIDVaccine.
- If you have further questions that relate to your personal health situation or when you can expect to get vaccinated, connect with your local public health unit or healthcare provider for further information.
- Please continue to listen to the guidance of your local public health authority to help reduce cases and serious illness as vaccinations continue to roll out.
- A series of resources will be provided to you stemming from this event, including a **toolkit** (in English/French) and **multilingual resources** that you can share with others to support informed decisions on vaccination and public health measures.