COVID-19 VACCINE FAQs

island health

VACCINE FACTS

1. Are the vaccines safe?
Health Canada reviews product safety data for all vaccines and drugs approved for use in Canada. They use rigorous analysis and testing to ensure both efficacy and safety. Health Canada completed a thorough, independent review of the evidence on the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and Health Canada has determined that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine meets the stringent safety, efficacy and quality requirements for use in Canada. Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada will continue to monitor vaccine safety, efficacy and quality. Read a summary of the evidence and documents related to the decision.

2. Why immunize for COVID-19?
The goal of immunizing for COVID-19 is to minimize serious illness and overall deaths, while minimizing societal disruption as a result of the pandemic.

3. How does it work?
Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna developed mRNA vaccines. mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that will trigger an immune response without using the live virus that causes COVID-19. Once triggered, our body then makes antibodies. These antibodies protect us from being infected if the real virus does enter our body in the future. 'RNA' stands for ribonucleic acid, which is a molecule that provides cells with instructions for making proteins. Messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines contain the genetic instructions for making the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein. This protein is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19.
When a person is given the vaccine, their cells will read the genetic instructions like a recipe and produce the spike protein. After the protein piece is made, the cell breaks down the instructions and gets rid of them. The cell then displays the protein piece on its surface. Our immune system recognizes that the protein doesn't belong there and begins building an immune response and making antibodies.

4. RECENT: **How do immunizers decide who gets Pfizer and who gets Moderna?**
Immunizers do not decide on the vaccine type to provide, this is determined by an operations committee. Vaccines are allocated by priority group and by vaccine storage and transport needs. People receiving the Pfizer vaccine are those who can travel to sites with ultra-cold storage capabilities. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are similar in their effectiveness in preventing COVID-19.

5. RECENT: **When will other vaccine brands be approved that are being reviewed?**
Health Canada has been reviewing AstraZeneca's vaccine since it was submitted on October 1, 2020, and is expediting the review of COVID-19 vaccines. Health Canada cannot provide a definite timeline for the completion of the review at this time (read more here). If there is approval of any additional vaccines, this information will be shared broadly by Health Canada. Updated information on vaccine procurement status is available on the Health Canada website.

6. How soon does one get the second dose after the initial dose?
Both Pfizer and Moderna vaccine products require two doses for the series. You will be contacted by a public health professional to schedule your second dose 35-42 days after your first dose. The decision to extend the timeline for the second dose is based on sound science and is support by both World Health Organization and National Advisory Committee on Immunization in Canada. Read more about the NACI's recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines (Jan. 12) on the Health Canada website. Dr. Bonnie Henry also addressed this topic in her update to the province on January 11th.

How long after immunization can a person expect to remain immune? If the virus attenuates will it be similar to our yearly flu vaccine.

7. What happens where there are shortages – or shipping/product delays?
Island Health is arranging clinics on the assumption that the product will be available as scheduled, but if there are supply shortages we will readjust our timelines as needed. We have a team working to ensure that all second doses will be available for those individuals who received the first dose.

8. RECENT: **If partial doses of vaccine remain in vials, could a half dose from one and a half dose from another be given in two injections?**
BCCDC policy prohibits the combination of two vials to make another dose. Only one needle may be used per vial to prevent contamination.

9. Does the 2nd dose have to be from the same manufacturer?
Yes. Your first and second dose need to be from the same manufacturer.

10. Will there be an option to choose which vaccine you wish to receive?
Not at this time, as supply is targeted and limited.

11. Once vaccinated, and after 14 days, can a person still pass on COVID if they are asymptomatic?
After an individual receives the COVID-19 vaccine, it is not likely that they will be able to transmit the virus. However, there may be a small possibility that transmission may occur even following immunization, and we are still evaluating the evidence on this question. That is why it is important to continue to practice public health measures, such as hand washing, physical distancing, wearing a mask in indoor public spaces, limiting our social interactions, and staying home when sick.

12. How are the vaccines kept cold?
Wireless temperature monitoring will ensure all vaccine fridges maintain the required temperatures. The cold storage must meet monitoring and reporting regulations as required by the CDC, BCCDC and College of Pharmacists. Read more:

- BC Pharmacists Cold Chain Management, accessed Dec 3, 2020
- BCCDC Biological management, accessed Dec 3, 2020