

## WHY GET IMMUNIZED?

### Why is immunization important?

Even healthy Albertans are at risk of severe illness and even death from COVID-19. Vaccines make your immune system stronger by building antibodies to help prevent diseases. It is much safer to get immunized than to get COVID-19. Immunization is the single most effective means of protecting yourself, your loved ones, and the greater community from the virus.

## HOW COVID-19 VACCINES WORK

### How do mRNA vaccines (Pfizer & Moderna) work?

[Pfizer](#) and [Moderna](#) vaccines are messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines. These vaccines contain the genetic instructions for making a protein that is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. It uses our cells to make this protein and triggers our immune system to make antibodies against it. Then, if the real virus enters our body in the future, these antibodies will help fight the infection.

### Will mRNA vaccines change my DNA?

No. Injecting mRNA into a person does not change the DNA of a human cell.

### How do viral vector-based vaccines (AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson) work?

The [AstraZeneca](#) and [Johnson & Johnson](#) vaccines are viral vector-based vaccines. These vaccines use a harmless virus, such as ones that cause the common cold, as a delivery system. This “vector” virus is not the virus that causes COVID-19. When a person is given the vaccine, this virus produces the protein that is found on the virus that causes COVID-19, helping your body to build an immune response.

### Is the AstraZeneca vaccine safe?

There have been cases of blood clots in people who received the AstraZeneca vaccine. It is important to remember that these blood clots are extremely rare. As of May 8, 2021, the risk of a blood clot resulting from the AstraZeneca vaccine in Canada has been estimated to be ~1 per 55,000 doses. Alberta Health and Health Canada are monitoring the scientific evidence and safety information of all COVID-19 vaccines administered in Alberta, and will adjust recommendations as needed.

### Do the current vaccines work against the variant strains of COVID-19?

At this time, there are several variant strains of COVID-19 circulating around the world, and vaccine manufacturers are conducting studies to determine whether current vaccines work against these variants. Initial studies have shown some effectiveness in fighting variant strains.

## BOOKING

### How do I book my vaccine?

Go to [www.ahs.ca/covidvaccine](http://www.ahs.ca/covidvaccine) to book an appointment or to find a pharmacy that gives the vaccine.

### If I received the AstraZeneca vaccine for my first dose, can I choose the vaccine I want for my second dose?

Yes, when you book your appointment you will be able to choose whether you receive a second dose of AstraZeneca or a dose of an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna). [The Government of Canada has said:](#)

- An mRNA vaccine is now preferred as the second dose for individuals who received a first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine.
- However, people who received two doses of AstraZeneca vaccine can rest assured that the vaccine provides good protection against infection and very good protection against severe disease and hospitalization.

If you have a contraindication or allergy to a vaccine ingredient, please speak with your healthcare provider before you receive the vaccine.

### I received an email offer to get the vaccine for a fee. Is this legitimate?

No. Any offers to provide vaccination to the public for a fee are not legitimate and should be reported to your local law enforcement agency.

## AFTER IMMUNIZATION

### I am fully immunized. Am I 100% protected?

COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective and will greatly reduce your risk of becoming infected. However, there is still a small chance that you can become infected with COVID-19 after being immunized — although being immunized may reduce the severity of the illness.

### Do I need to continue following public health measures such as masking and social distancing after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine?

People who have received COVID-19 vaccine are still required to follow all [public health measures](#) put in place to prevent the spread of the virus.

### I recently received the vaccine, and a few days later I developed symptoms and then tested positive for COVID-19. Why did this happen?

None of the COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in Canada contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. This means that a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19. After receiving a vaccine, it takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity so that you are protected from the virus. Therefore, you can still get infected with COVID-19 just before or just after being immunized, and become sick after your immunization occurred.

*This document was created using information from Alberta Health Services' [FAQs](#) on June 9, 2021.*