

COVID-19 Immunization Program

Vaccine Hesitancy

Purpose

To provide a resource for employers to speak to employees about vaccine hesitancy.

Vaccine Hesitancy

Vaccine hesitancy refers to being reluctant to receive a recommended vaccine due to personal concerns or doubts. A person who is vaccine hesitant may be more willing to get the vaccine if it is convenient if they are provided with the right information.

There are many reasons a person may be hesitant to receive a vaccine, but reassurance and dialogue with co-workers, friends and family, fewer barriers to access, and information sharing may alleviate a person's concerns.

Discussing Vaccines

Conversations on vaccines should be approached with compassion, as it is a personal choice that may have strong emotions attached. It is important to try to understand where a person is coming from and discuss their concerns.

Concerns often fall into three categories:

- Lack of confidence in the government, health agencies or vaccines
- Complacency that the benefit of the vaccine, or the risk of COVID-19 is low
- Reduced access to the vaccine due to language barriers, lack of technology or inconvenience

Lack of Confidence

All vaccines used in Canada must obtain regulatory approval through Health Canada and

must meet strict standards for safety, quality and effectiveness.

The following vaccines have been approved:

- AstraZeneca (18 years of age or older)¹
- Janssen (18 years of age or older)
- Moderna (18 years of age or older)
- Pfizer-BioNTech (12 years of age or older)

Though these vaccine approvals were rapid, they were not rushed. No steps were skipped throughout the approval processes. The research to make these types of vaccines has been conducted over the past thirty years.

mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) provide instructions to your cells for how to make a coronavirus protein. This protein will trigger an immune response that will help to protect you against COVID-19.

Viral vector vaccines (AstraZeneca and Janssen) use a virus that's been made harmless to produce coronavirus proteins in your body without causing disease. Similar to mRNA vaccines, this protein will teach the immune system how to recognize and fight the real virus.

The vaccines cannot give you COVID-19 because they don't contain the virus that causes it. The vaccines also cannot change your DNA. There are no microchips in the vaccines.

Benefits of Vaccines

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are proven to be highly effective and prevent serious illness and death by 80-90%. The AstraZeneca

¹ AstraZeneca will only be provided as a first dose to those Albertans over the age of 18 who cannot receive or refuse to receive Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

vaccine reduces infection by 60-70% and hospitalizations by 80%.

In a real world example, in January the U.K. was in a wave of infections that saw 68,000 people diagnosed with COVID-19 in one day. Due to restrictions and a rapid vaccine roll-out, the number of new cases has been reduced by 96%. Deaths from COVID-19 are down 99% and hospitalizations have reduced by 97%. They have been able to ease restrictions.

A single dose of Canada's COVID-19 vaccines offer at least 80% protection against severe outcomes, including hospitalization and death. However, second doses are needed to get the best and most long-lasting protection against the virus.

Second doses improve protection against infection, transmission, and severe outcomes better than first doses alone.

All approved vaccines are safe and effective.

Risks of COVID-19

COVID-19 is a serious disease that has led to more than 2,100 deaths in Alberta. The youngest person to die due to COVID-19 in Alberta was 20 years old. 4% of Albertans who get COVID-19 will require hospitalization, and the average age for hospitalization is 60.

Even if a person does not get severe illness, they could infect someone who does. All Albertans must work together to protect one another.

Another risk of the virus is long-COVID, a condition where symptoms are still present for months after being diagnosed. These symptoms can have a significant impact on a person's quality of life. It is estimated that 10% of all people who contract COVID-19 will suffer from long-COVID. Research continues on the after-effects of the virus, but initial indications are that long-COVID affects healthy people of all ages and backgrounds.

[Data on current cases](#) is updated daily on the Government of Alberta website.

Access to Immunization

There are multiple ways that employers can support employees in accessing a vaccine (see Employer Immunization Clinic Information resource attached).

For most Albertans, appointments can be booked through participating pharmacies, online with Alberta Health Services (AHS) or by calling Health Link. Some community physicians are also administering vaccines in their clinics.

Individuals who received the AstraZeneca vaccine for their first dose can choose either the AstraZeneca vaccine or an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer/Moderna) for their second dose.

Albertans who received a first dose of AstraZeneca will have a choice:

- Book a second appointment for the AstraZeneca vaccine by calling 811 or going online to AHS's booking site, or
- Book a second appointment for an mRNA vaccine through participating pharmacies or AHS.

First Nations individuals living on a reserve are able to book appointments through their local health centres. COVID-19 immunization outreach services are also available in Métis Settlements through AHS public health. First Nations, Inuit and Métis people can also access COVID-19 immunization services off-reserve or off-settlement through AHS Public Health, community pharmacies, participating physicians and other outreach immunization clinics (e.g. friendship centres).

For other populations, AHS will provide outreach in specific circumstances as needed, including some rural areas without pharmacies.

Resources on vaccinations have been [translated into multiple languages](#).

Vaccine Side-Effects

Some individuals will experience short-term mild to moderate side effects for one to two days after receiving the vaccine. Some side effects, including fever, are more frequent after the second dose.

It is important to note that the common short-term side-effects are not necessarily bad. It means your immune system is functioning and building the necessary protections for you.

On rare occasions, a person may have an allergic reaction to a vaccine, which is why you are asked to remain in the facility for 15 minutes after getting a vaccine. Most people with allergies (e.g., to food, medication or substances not included in the vaccine) or those who have had a previous adverse reaction following immunization will be able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, but if a person has concerns, they should talk to their health care provider.

After receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine there have been rare, but serious, instances of blood clots. These are treatable so it is critical to seek immediate medical attention if you have any signs or symptoms. Albertans 18 and older can access the AstraZeneca vaccine if they have a contraindication to, or refuse, the mRNA vaccines.

Immunization is Voluntary and Strongly Recommended

COVID-19 immunization will not be mandatory in Alberta, but it is highly encouraged and recommended. Alberta's approach is collaborative rather than mandatory to encourage conversations on the benefits of immunization, while still respecting Albertans' right to make informed decisions about their own health. There is no intent to restrict the activities of those who choose not to immunize.