COVID-19 mRNA Vaccine Information for Individuals aged 5 years and older

Public Health - Factsheet for Parents and Guardians
September 2023

Manitoba

Immunization is one of the most important accomplishments in public health. Over the past 50 years, immunization has led to the elimination, containment and control of diseases that were once very common in Canada.[1] Vaccines help our immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

The factsheet is meant for individuals aged 5 years and older who are getting the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine. COVID-19 vaccine recommendations are different for people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised. If you are moderately to severely immunocompromised due to disease (e.g., organ transplant, leukemia, lymphoma) or treatment (e.g., chemotherapy, high-dose steroids), or have an autoimmune condition (e.g., Rheumatoid Arthritis, Multiple Sclerosis (MS)), refer to the factsheet titled, "COVID-19 Vaccine: Information for Individuals who have an autoimmune condition and/or are immunocompromised" available at: www.manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/resources.html.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a virus in the coronavirus family. The virus that causes COVID-19 can spread from person to person through respiratory droplets and aerosols from someone infected with the virus. Respiratory droplets and aerosols are made when we do every day things like talk, cough, breathe, sneeze or sing. COVID-19 may also spread by touching something that has the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands. Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness, but the virus can affect different people in different ways. Some will become seriously ill and require medical attention.

Up-to-date data on COVID-19 in Manitoba is available at: www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/surveillance/covid-19/index.html.

Does COVID-19 affect children?

While most children who get COVID-19 have no symptoms or experience only mild symptoms, some become very sick requiring care in the hospital. Children with underlying medical conditions may be at an increased risk of experiencing serious illness. Children who have been infected with COVID-19 are at risk of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C), a rare but serious complication of COVID-19 infection. Children with MIS-C usually require admission to hospital.

Children may also experience symptoms consistent with post-COVID-19 condition (also referred to as long COVID). While it appears that children have a lower risk of post-COVID-19 condition compared to adults, research is ongoing about the frequency and severity of post-COVID-19 condition in children.

What is the updated XBB.1.5 formulation of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine?

Updated formulations of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines have been developed to protect against the XBB.1.5 strain of the COVID-19 virus. They have been approved for use in:

- Individuals 6 months and older who have never received a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Individuals 6 months and older who have already received a COVID-19 vaccine and need one or more additional doses to complete their primary series
- Individuals 6 months and older who have completed a primary series with COVID-19 vaccines and are recommended to receive an additional dose for fall 2023

[1] The Public Health Agency of Canada

Should I get a dose of the updated XBB.1.5 formulation of the COVID-19 vaccine if I have already received more than one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine before?

Evidence suggests that the protection provided by previous doses of the COVID-19 vaccine decreases over time. An additional dose with the updated XBB.1.5 formulation is offered to restore protection that may have decreased over time.

Beginning in the fall of 2023 for those previously vaccinated against COVID-19, individuals aged 6 months and older are recommended to receive a dose of the new XBB.1.5 formulation of COVID-19 vaccine if it has been at least 6 months from the previous COVID-19 vaccine dose or known SARS-CoV-2 infection (whichever is later).

Immunization is particularly important for those at increased risk of COVID-19 infection or severe disease, for example:

- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Residents of long-term care homes and other congregate living settings
- Individuals with underlying medical conditions that place them at higher risk of severe COVID-19
- Individuals who are pregnant
- Individuals in or from First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities
- Members of racialized and other equity-deserving communities
- People who provide essential community services

Is the mRNA vaccine for children the same as the vaccine given to teens/adults?

Generally speaking, yes. The mRNA vaccines used for children have a lower dose than the vaccine dose given to teens and adults.

Is the mRNA vaccine safe?

Yes, they are safe. In general, the side effects observed during the Pfizer and Moderna clinical trials were similar to other vaccines. The side effects were generally mild or moderate, and went away a few days after vaccination. They included symptoms like:

- pain, redness and swelling at the site of injection
- body chills
- feeling tired and feverish
- headache
- muscle and joint pain
- nausea and vomiting

These are common side effects of the vaccine and are not a risk to your health. Over-the-counter medicines like acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g., Advil®) may be considered to help manage these adverse events (like pain or fever, respectively), if they occur **after vaccination**.

Very rare reactions following vaccination have also occurred in less than 1 in 10,000 vaccinated people. This would include the following:

1. Myocarditis/pericarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle/lining around the heart) has been rarely reported following immunization with the mRNA vaccines. It has occurred mostly in males less than 30 years of age, more often after the second dose of vaccine, usually within a week following vaccination. Vaccine related myocarditis/pericarditis is a much milder condition than infection related myocarditis/pericarditis. The majority of cases have responded well to treatment and recovered quickly.

The signs and symptoms of myocarditis/pericarditis can include shortness of breath, chest pain, or the feeling of a rapid or abnormal heart rhythm. If you experience any of these symptoms, go to the nearest emergency department or health centre.

2. Bell's palsy (weakness or paralysis on one side of the face) has been very rarely reported following immunization with the mRNA vaccines. In the majority of cases, it is temporary. However, in rare cases, there can be long-term complications.

   The signs and symptoms of Bell's palsy tend to appear suddenly, and can include mild weakness to total paralysis on one side of the face affecting facial muscle movement, headache, loss of feeling in the face, hypersensitivity to sound in the affected ear or loss of sense of taste on the tongue. If you experience any of these symptoms, contact your health care provider.

3. Serious allergic reactions are also possible following vaccination. In the unlikely event of a severe allergic reaction, it is important to stay in the immunization clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. Symptoms of allergic reactions can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. This can happen up to an hour after you get vaccinated. If this happens after you leave the immunization clinic, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department or health centre for immediate attention.

Report any serious or unexpected adverse reactions to a health care provider, or call Health Links – Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 (toll free in Manitoba).

Who should NOT get the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine?

As a precautionary measure, individuals who experienced myocarditis/pericarditis following vaccination with any dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, should defer further COVID-19 vaccination until more information is available. People who would prefer not to defer vaccination should talk to their immunizer or health care provider about the risks and benefits of proceeding with vaccination. People who have a history of myocarditis unrelated to mRNA COVID-19 vaccination should consult their clinical team prior to vaccination.

An allergy referral is required before vaccination if you are allergic to an active substance or any ingredients of Pfizer or Moderna, or if you have had a severe allergic reaction after the first dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. An allergic reaction can be life-threatening. For information about any of the COVID-19 vaccine ingredients, please review the vaccine manufacturer's product monograph at www.manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/resources.html or speak with your immunizer or health care provider. There are two ingredients that are potential allergens known to cause possible allergic reactions, including serious reactions:

1. Polyethylene glycol (PEG) is an ingredient in both Pfizer or Moderna and may be found in a multitude of products including bowel preparation products for colonoscopies, laxatives, cough syrup, cosmetics, contact lens care solutions, skin care products, certain medications and as an additive in some food and drinks. People with PEG allergies may also be allergic to polysorbate 80. **If you are allergic to PEG or polysorbate 80, regardless of the severity of reaction, speak with your health care provider before immunization**.

2. Tromethamine (trometamol or Tris) may be found in certain medications and some contrast material (CT dye). If you had an allergic reaction after receiving CT dye or are allergic specifically to tromethamine, regardless of the severity of reaction, speak with your health care provider before immunization.

Allergic reactions generally happen shortly after the vaccine is administered. **This is why you must be observed for a minimum of 15 minutes after immunization**.

You can be immunized if you have allergies not related to the vaccine, such as allergies to foods, insect stings or seasonal/environmental allergies. Talk to your immunizer or health care provider about all of your allergies before vaccination.

If you were infected with COVID-19 (e.g., confirmed by a positive PCR test or rapid antigen test (RAT)), you're recommended to wait six months after your infection before getting your next dose of vaccine.

If you were previously infected with COVID-19 and received a monoclonal antibody treatment (e.g., Sotrovimab, Casirivimab, Imdevimab), you should consult with your health care provider on the best time to receive a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Your record of protection

All immunizations, including the COVID-19 vaccine, are recorded on your immunization record in Manitoba's immunization registry. This registry:

- allows health care providers to find out which immunizations you (or the people you care for) have received or need to have
- may be used to produce immunization records or notify you or your health care provider if a particular immunization has been missed
- allows Manitoba Health and public health officials to monitor how well vaccines work in preventing disease

The Personal Health Information Act protects your information and the information for any people you provide care for. You can choose to have this personal health information hidden from health care providers. For additional information, please contact your local public health office or speak with a health care provider.

For information and to obtain your Manitoba immunization record or PanCanadian Proof of Vaccination Credential (PVC), go to www.manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine.html#certificates-and-records.

For more information on the COVID-19 vaccine:

For more information about COVID-19 or the COVID-19 vaccines, talk to your health care provider.

You can also call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at **204-788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** (toll free in Manitoba).

Or visit:

Province of Manitoba: manitoba.ca/covid19/index.html

Government of Canada: canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html