

## COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign – Status Update

**Campaign launch & progress to date:** The BC COVID-19 vaccination campaign was launched in mid-December. With the limited quantities of vaccine currently available, VCH has followed the Ministry of Health guidelines to offer vaccine to the following priority populations to date:

- Long Term Care Facilities - residents, staff and essential visitors
- Assisted Living Facilities – residents, staff, and essential visitors (including a small number of Independent Living clients in facilities with common communal areas)
- Selected acute care hospital staff and medical staff caring for COVID-19 patients (Emergency Department, COVID-19 wards, COVID-19 ICUs and outbreak wards)
- Vancouver Downtown Eastside shelters where there has been transmission

As more vaccine is delivered to BC over the coming weeks and months, additional priority groups will be offered vaccination. Community Family Physicians, Nurse Practitioners and Medical Specialists will be notified when you will be invited for vaccination.

**COVID-19 vaccines:** Two mRNA vaccines, Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna, are approved for use in Canada. Both of these vaccines contain mRNA or genetic code for the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The antigen is encapsulated in a lipid nanoparticle capsule that enables delivery of the mRNA into muscle cells. Within the cells, the mRNA works with the cellular machinery to produce the spike protein which migrates and adheres to the outside of the cell. The recipient's immune system recognizes this antigen as foreign protein thereby generating a protective humoral and cellular immune response against the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

**Vaccine efficacy** against symptomatic laboratory-confirmed infection is 95% after a 2-dose series of either vaccine. Protection beginning 14 days after one dose of either vaccine is >90%. The duration of protection from one or two doses is not yet known but is being actively monitored.

**Recommended interval between the two vaccine doses** is 21-28 days as per product monographs. However, the World Health Organization and the Canadian National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) support an interval up to 42 days, and other jurisdictions are using a longer interval of up to 12 weeks. This allows a greater number of people to receive a first dose of vaccine, given limited vaccine supply currently and high rates of COVID-19 transmission. In BC, those vaccinated will be offered a second dose beginning 35 days after their first dose.

You can reach a Medical Health Officer at 604.675.3900 Toll free at 1.855.675.3900  
For public health emergencies after hours contact the Medical Health Officer on call at 604.527.4893

Vancouver Coastal Health Medical Health Officers

Chief Medical Health Officer: Dr. Patricia Daly

Vancouver: Dr. Alex Choi, Dr. Althea Hayden, Dr. Mark Lysyshyn, Dr. Michael Schwandt 604.675.3900  
Richmond: Dr. Meena Dawar 604.233.3150 | North Shore & Coast Rural: Dr. John Harding 604.983.6701  
To receive Physicians' Updates by email please contact us at: [VCHPhysiciansUpdate@vch.ca](mailto:VCHPhysiciansUpdate@vch.ca)

**Contraindications:** The only contraindication to either vaccine is a known, severe allergy to polyethylene glycol, another component of the vaccine, or an anaphylactic reaction to a first vaccine dose. Polyethylene glycol is a component in some cosmetics, skin care products, laxatives, cough syrups, and bowel preparations for colonoscopy.

While the product monographs identify a number of precautions because these populations were not included in the original vaccine trials, in the context of ongoing risk of COVID-19, the following individuals can be offered vaccination:

- Pregnant or breast-feeding women
- Those who have recently received any other immunization or a TB skin test
- Those with immunocompromising conditions or on medications that weaken their immune system

**Vaccination of individuals with a history of laboratory-confirmed COVID-19:**

Individuals with history of COVID-19 should be immunized with a two-dose series. However, as vaccine quantities are currently limited, those with a history of laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 within the last 3 months are expected to have protection for the short-term, and can have their vaccinations deferred.

**Vaccine handling:** Both mRNA vaccines require special storage and handling: The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is distributed and stored at -70°C with a limited shelf life of 5 days at 2-8°C. The Moderna vaccine is distributed and stored at -20°C, though it can be maintained at 2-8°C for 30 days.

**Role of community physicians in the vaccination campaign:**

Given the current limited vaccine inventory and unique storage and handling requirements, distributing vaccine to physicians for use within your offices is not currently possible. We appreciate your support in answering your patients' questions, clarifying any misinformation they may have, and in recommending vaccine to eligible individuals.

**COVID-19 Vaccine information for physicians:**

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine>

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