



FAQ

COVID-19 information for people who are immunocompromised

What is COVID-19?

- COVID-19 is an illness caused by the Sars-CoV-2 virus which spreads very easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing or talking.¹
- This virus causes a wide range of symptoms from mild (and sometimes no symptoms) to very severe.
- COVID-19 can affect many of the body's systems, but it most often affects the lungs and can cause symptoms like cough, fever, tiredness, a sore throat or trouble breathing.²
- Most vaccinated people get better on their own, older adults, infants and those with a weakened immune system are at a high risk for serious complications.

How do COVID-19 vaccines work?

- COVID-19 vaccines help keep you safe by training your body to fight the virus.
- While COVID-19 vaccines can reduce your chances of infection, you may still contract COVID-19.
- They introduce your immune system to small, harmless, non-live parts of the virus.
- This helps your immune system recognize and remember the virus so it can fight it off if you are exposed to COVID-19 in the future.
- By preparing your body this way, vaccines lower your chances of getting severely sick from COVID-19.³

How to prevent COVID-19 infections:

- ▶ **mRNA Vaccines:** Instead of using live viruses, mRNA vaccines teach your cells how to produce a small part of the virus. This piece of the virus helps your immune system learn to recognize and fight the virus. When your body sees this piece, it creates antibodies, which are proteins that help you fight off the virus if you come into contact with it. Since mRNA vaccines do not use live viruses, they cannot give you COVID-19, but they can help your body be prepared to prevent serious illness.
- ▶ **Protein-based vaccines:** Protein-based vaccines use small, harmless parts of the virus called proteins to help your immune system learn to fight the virus. The difference between mRNA and protein-based vaccines is mRNA vaccines tell your cells to make a harmless part of the virus, while protein-based vaccines give your body the virus protein directly to help your immune system learn how to fight it.
- ▶ **Monoclonal antibodies (mAbs):** mAbs are lab-made proteins that help your body fight COVID-19. They can be given before the body has been exposed to COVID-19, or during an infection. mAbs provide direct protection by preventing the virus from infecting more cells. Protection from mAbs happens right away, which is helpful for people who might not respond well to vaccines due to a weakened immune system.

Why are COVID-19 vaccines important for people who are IC?

- Immunocompromised (IC) people are more likely to get very sick from COVID-19 because their immune systems have a harder time fighting off viruses.⁹
- IC people are at a higher risk of more serious health problems, longer hospital stays, long-term complications and a greater chance of death from COVID-19.
- The COVID-19 vaccine offers extra protection for IC people by reducing the risk of severe health outcomes such as hospitalization from COVID-19 and lowering the chances of long-COVID, which are symptoms that continue after the infection.



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What other COVID-19 protections should IC people consider?

Antiviral drugs:

- Antiviral drugs help your body fight COVID-19 once you test positive for the virus.¹⁰
- This treatment is for those at risk for severe COVID-19 infections, like older adults and those with weaker immune systems.
- The two antiviral drugs to help you fight COVID-19 that are approved in Canada are **Paxlovid** and **Remdesivir**.¹¹

Paxlovid

- Your healthcare provider will prescribe Paxlovid based on your needs and medical history, but you must test positive for COVID-19.
- Treatment must begin within five days of symptom onset.¹²
- Paxlovid is taken as a series of pills twice a day over five days.

Remdesivir

- Your healthcare provider will help you decide if Remdesivir is the right treatment for you, and like Paxlovid you must test positive for COVID-19.¹³
- Remdesivir is given through an IV (intravenous), which is a tube placed in your vein.
- This treatment must be started within seven days of COVID-19 symptoms.

Public health measures to stay safe from COVID-19:

- Stay home if you're feeling sick.
- Consider wearing a mask to protect yourself and others.
- Wash your hands often.
- Clean and disinfect items you touch if you are sick.
- Use air filters and other ventilation-enhancing approaches to improve air quality.
- If you have a COVID-19 infection, stay home until you have tested negative on two COVID-19 tests within 48 hours.

What are the current COVID-19 vaccine guidelines?

Canada's current guidelines recommend:

- IC people will be eligible to get the latest COVID-19 vaccine (KP.2 strain), either mRNA or protein subunit, in the fall of 2024.
- You can receive a COVID-19 vaccine if it has been more than 3 months since your last COVID-19 vaccine or COVID-19 infection. Talk to your healthcare provider to discuss a schedule that works best for you.
- This vaccine will be updated yearly to protect against the newest strains of COVID-19.

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