COVID-19 Vaccination Program

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Last updated: June 5, 2021

Vaccines save lives by protecting people from infections that can cause severe illness and even death. If enough people get vaccinated, immunizations also protect communities by making it difficult for diseases – like COVID-19 – to spread. Not only will this protect people, the vaccine will also help us to reach herd immunity so that we can get back to our regular activities.

At this point, even once you’ve had the vaccine, you must still abide by the Provincial Health Officer orders and guidelines. It’s also important that you continue to practice the public health measures that we’ve grown accustomed to: maintain your distance, wear the appropriate PPE, clean your hands regularly and stay home if you are feeling unwell.

All PHSA staff should make sure they are registered on getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca. This platform will issue invitations for both first and second dose vaccinations and may also be used for additional communication down the road.

For information about vaccine doses, safety and sequencing, visit the BCCDC webpages on the COVID-19 vaccine.

You may also want to review the BCCDC Vaccination at a Glance or ImmunizeBC’s How Vaccines Work.

General COVID-19 vaccine information specifically for PHSA employees

1. Is the vaccine safe?
   The COVID-19 vaccines that have been approved by Health Canada are safe, effective and will save lives. Once a vaccine is approved and in use, vaccine safety is continuously monitored to identify rare side effects. Canada has one of the most rigorous regulatory systems to authorize new vaccines for use. Health Canada approval ensures that:
   • Laboratory and clinical studies provide evidence that the vaccine is safe and effective
   • The manufacturing process and the vaccine meet the highest standards of quality
   • During development, vaccines are first tested in animals before testing in humans. Testing in humans is done over three phases of clinical trials. These clinical trials provide crucial information on vaccine safety and effectiveness.
   Read more from the BCCDC about the vaccine approval process.

2. Am I required to get vaccinated?
   While recommended, it is not mandatory for staff to receive the vaccine. Feeling worried or hesitant is completely normal when something is new. We can be assured that Health Canada has a thorough approval process that ensures the safety of the many vaccines and medicines we take routinely. This rigorous process is used before any vaccines are approved for use in Canada.

3. What can I tell my patients/clients about the COVID-19 vaccine?
   Please refer your patients/clients to the BCCDC website for more information. There are also details for specific populations, such as cancer, maternity, pediatric and mental health patients/clients, available on the respective PHSA program websites. The BCCDC website also has information for the clinically extremely vulnerable populations.

4. How will you track who has received the vaccine and when they need to return for a second dose?
   Your COVID-19 vaccination status is attached to your Personal Health Number (PHN). The provincial system – getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca – is able to connect your PHN with your eligibility for your first dose
(if you have not yet received it) and your eligibility for your second dose. The system will send you invitations to book based on your preferred contact information. Regardless of where you received your first dose, ensure you are registered at getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca.

A record of your COVID-19 immunization will also be available online through Health Gateway. Health Gateway can be accessed from your computer, tablet or mobile phone using your Mobile Card. You can also download the CANImmunize app to keep track of your COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines.

5. Can I get time off work to get vaccinated?
The B.C. government has introduced amendments to the Employment Standards Act to provide staff with a paid leave of up to three hours to be vaccinated against COVID-19. This amendment ensures that no employee will lose pay if they need time away from scheduled work to get vaccinated. This applies to both full-time and part-time employees. For more information on coding and the effective dates for this change, visit the Timekeeping & Scheduling section of the PHSA website.

Due to the nature of our work, not all staff will require leave to get their COVID-19 vaccination, including if appointments are made outside of work hours.

This leave does not apply to staff assisting family members to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Staff who need time off work to assist a dependent or family member remain eligible for an unpaid leave of absence.

While the Employment Standards Act does not apply to salaried physicians, PHSA strongly believes in the importance of COVID-19 vaccines and will be making paid vaccination leave available to all PHSA salaried physicians. Physicians who are engaged as independent contractors or on a fee-for-service basis will be treated in the same manner as non-physician independent contractors of PHSA, who are not eligible for this leave.

6. What should I do if I experience a side effect?
While mild side effects are expected, if you experience any unusual, persistent or serious side effects, you should call 8-1-1 or your family doctor. If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 after vaccination, you should stay home from work and use the COVID-19 self-assessment tool to determine if testing is required. As usual, notify your supervisor and code your time appropriately. While the vaccine is very effective, if you were unknowingly infected with COVID-19 in the days before your vaccination, you may develop symptoms afterwards.

7. Do I have to continue wearing PPE after I’m vaccinated?
Recipients of the vaccine must continue to follow all infection prevention and control guidelines while at work as it is not possible or practical to check every staff member’s vaccination status while at work. Vaccination is very effective in preventing symptomatic COVID-19. Although it is not likely, it is still possible that vaccine recipients can acquire the virus without symptoms and transmit it to others. Until more people are protected and there is more data available, people must continue to follow all PPE protocols while at work.

8. Once I get vaccinated, how long do I have to adhere to physical distancing and other measures?
Provincial orders/guidelines remain in place for everyone, regardless of whether they have been vaccinated. After immunizations begin, it will still be important to clean your hands regularly, maintain physical distance, wear a mask and stay home when sick. These layers of protection are still essential as vaccines roll out.

9. Once I get vaccinated, can I travel? Will I still have to self-isolate after international travel?
At this point, federal and provincial orders/guidelines remain in place for everyone, regardless of whether they have been vaccinated. You can view PHSA’s travel guidelines on SHOP.
10. Once I get vaccinated, do I need to start going back to the office if I've been working remotely?
   No. However, PHSA’s workplaces are safe so that all those who want to, or need to, come back to the office are able to do so. Please continue to discuss your individual work situation with your supervisor and refer to PHSA’s flexible work options policy.

Other resources:

- BCCDC COVID-19 vaccine
- Immunize BC
- Government of BC COVID-19 vaccines