

COVID-19 Vaccination and Cancer FAQ

As a person living with cancer or a blood or bone marrow condition, you may have questions about COVID-19 vaccination.

All vaccinations should only be considered after careful assessment of the risks and benefits. Talk to your cancer care team if you have questions about the vaccine and your unique situation.

Is the vaccine safe for people with cancer?

Before being approved by Health Canada, COVID-19 vaccines have been tested on thousands of people and have been found to be safe and effective. The vaccines available in Canada have now been given to millions of people across the world.

The vaccines have not yet been tested on cancer patients but from studying other vaccines, such as the flu shot, doctors believe that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe for most people with cancer.

How well does the vaccine work in people with cancer?

COVID-19 vaccines have been shown to work very well to protect people from serious illness. How well the vaccine works depends on the strength of your immune system. Some cancers or cancer treatments can weaken your immune system. We recommend that you plan to get the vaccine when your immune system is at its strongest (see "When should I get the vaccine?").

Studies on COVID-19 vaccines have not tested cancer patients, so it is hard to say if the vaccine will work as well for you as for others. However, any protection against COVID-19 is very important, so you should get the vaccine when it is available to you.

When should I get the vaccine?

If you are having surgery for your cancer, you should not get the vaccine the week before or the week after your surgery.

Some people with cancer should have the vaccine as soon as it is available to them. You do not need to talk to your cancer care team before getting the vaccine if:

- You have cancer and are **not** on active treatment for it.
- You are on Radiation Therapy **only**.
- You have been treated in the past for cancer.
- You are a Hematology patient with a diagnosis of a non-cancer blood problem and are **not** on active treatment for it.
- You are a friend, family member or caregiver of someone with cancer.

Some people with cancer should talk to their family doctor, nurse practitioner, pharmacist, or cancer care team about the best timing for getting the vaccine. Talk to any health care provider who is part of your care before getting the vaccine if:

- You had a Bone Marrow or Stem Cell Transplant **more** than 3 months ago and have been doing well.
- You are taking pills for your cancer treatment, such as hormones, targeted therapy, or oral chemotherapy.

Other people with cancer will need to talk to their cancer care team about the best timing for getting the vaccine. Talk to your cancer care team before getting it if:

- You have Acute Leukemia (AML or ALL).
- You had a Bone Marrow or Stem Cell Transplant **less** than 3 months ago.
- You have received CAR-T Cell Therapy.
- You have been asked to carry an Orange Alert Card for your treatment with an immune checkpoint inhibitor.
- You are on any cancer treatment given through an IV such as chemotherapy or interferon therapy.

Does it matter which vaccine I get?

No. Any one of the vaccines that has been approved by Health Canada is fine to receive. We do not recommend one over another. For more information about Nova Scotia's COVID-19 immunization plan visit: <http://www.nshealth.ca/coronavirusvaccine>.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Serious side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine are very rare. Most side effects are mild and will go away on their own after 1-3 days. Common side effects are:

- Pain in your arm where the needle was given
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Muscle aches or joint pain
- Chills or fever
- Diarrhea or vomiting

If you have a history of severe, life-threatening allergies, speak with your family doctor or nurse practitioner before getting the vaccine.

I still have questions about the vaccine. Who should I talk to?

If you have any questions about the vaccine and your condition, including when to get the vaccine, please ask your cancer care team. They will be happy to discuss this with you in more detail.

What happens after I get the vaccine?

Even after getting the vaccine, you should continue to follow all Public Health guidelines including physical distancing, mask wearing and hand washing. For more information about when and where COVID-19 vaccines will be available to you, visit: <http://www.nshealth.ca/coronavirusvaccine>. For questions about breast cancer screening and COVID-19 vaccinations visit: <http://breastscreening.nshealth.ca>.

Nova Scotia Health promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.

Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

Nova Scotia Health
www.nshealth.ca

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The information in this brochure is for informational and educational purposes only.

The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider. The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.