



February 25, 2021

Dear Patients,

It has been a while since we've provided a COVID update and we felt it was time to provide some insight into vaccinations. In short: Help (ie. vaccine supply) is on the way! As always though, the devil will be in the details...

We are well aware that the provincial government announced last week that family physicians would begin contacting patients aged 80 and above in order to schedule vaccinations. Unfortunately, it is still somewhat premature for us to begin doing so-- considering we still don't have any further details regarding how, when, or where to schedule vaccine appointments.

At GFHC, we are certainly ready, willing, and able to vaccinate our patients as soon as the opportunity arises. However, given the handling specifications required of the currently available mRNA vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna), we anticipate that the next phase of vaccinations will be conducted in more centralized vaccination centres, rather than our office. As soon as vaccines do become available to our clinic you can count on hearing more from us.

In the interim, it is our sincere hope and expectation that vaccines will start rolling out more widely in the community extremely soon. As you all know, the first vaccines have been given to higher-risk people and healthcare workers. As more supply continues to become available, more members of our community will be able to receive their shots. Vaccine availability may vary from region to region (ie. Toronto vs York Region vs Peel Region, etc), so we would encourage all of our patients to pay close attention to their local announcements as the rollout continues. **Regardless of time and place, we look forward to when ALL of our patients will have access to the vaccine-- hopefully sooner rather than later!**

We are well aware as well that many of our patients still have some questions about the COVID vaccines themselves. We have attempted to collect some reputable sources below for your reference, including some Frequently Asked Questions about COVID vaccines as well as some common myths and misperceptions. We encourage you to review the resources here-- but as always, if you do have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact your Family Doctor.

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## **RESOURCES:**

- [Government of Canada - Vaccines for COVID-19](#)
- [Ontario - COVID-19 vaccination program](#)
- [Ontario - COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan](#) (Feb 2021)
- [Ontario College of Family Physicians - Common questions from patients 80+](#) (Feb 2021)
- [Busting common myths about mRNA vaccines](#) (Jan 2021)
- [Pfizer and Moderna vaccines](#) (Jan 2021)

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

- **Was COVID vaccine development rushed?**
  - The vaccines were developed so fast because it was a top priority for everyone in the field. Billions of dollars were spent by governments and companies around the world with the goal of developing a vaccine as soon as possible; the scientific world worked in tandem and streamlined processes in ways that had not previously been possible; and the bureaucratic process was expedited to minimize any impediments. So yes, vaccine development was rushed-- by design. This is a good thing, as we need the vaccines now. However it does NOT mean safety was at all compromised.
- **What is this new mRNA vaccine technology?**
  - mRNA technology has been studied and used for cancer treatments for upwards of 30 years, but this is the first vaccine using the technology. There are two vaccines made this way (Pfizer and Moderna). mRNA vaccines cannot give someone COVID-19 as they do not use the live virus that causes COVID-19. They also do not affect or interact with our bodies' DNA in any way. There will be other vaccines coming later which are made with older technology.
- **Are the vaccines effective?**
  - Both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines prevented COVID infections by approximately 95% compared to controls who did not receive the vaccine in large clinical trials which enrolled tens of thousands of participants.
  - Full vaccine protection comes after the second dose is received, which boosts the immune response and likely makes protection more durable.
  - Overall, these impressive results put the two mRNA vaccines up there with our most effective vaccines to date.
  - Moreover, the vaccines not only prevented any disease due to SARS-CoV-2, but — importantly — also reduced the risk of severe disease. Prevention of severe disease could potentially transform COVID-19 from the global threat it is now into more of a nuisance, like the common cold.



- **Are there side effects after receiving the shot?**
  - The most common side effect is pain at the injection site, especially 12-24 hours after the shot. (Only ~1% of trial participants categorized pain as “severe.”)
  - Other common side-effects: fatigue, fever, headaches.
  - Side effects generally resolve within 1-2 days and are responsive to acetaminophen or antiinflammatory medications (eg. ibuprofen).
  - In general, side effects are more common in younger vaccine recipients than in older ones, with the second shot more likely to cause side effects than the first.
  - Very rare side effect: anaphylaxis (typically in reaction to the vaccine ingredient polyethylene glycol). Current estimates suggest anaphylaxis may occur at a rate of approximately 2-6 cases per million doses.
  
- **Can I get vaccinated while pregnant or breastfeeding?**
  - Pregnant and breastfeeding women were not included in trials for the currently available vaccines. However, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada has stated that “*the documented risk of not getting the COVID-19 vaccine outweighs the theorized and undescribed risk of being vaccinated during pregnancy or while breastfeeding and vaccination should be offered.*”
  - mRNA vaccines are not live vaccines and are not expected to present a risk to a breastfeeding infant.
  - If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, we can discuss risks and benefits to help you make an informed decision about receiving the vaccine.
  
- **Can people with allergies get vaccinated?**
  - People who have ever had a severe allergic reaction (i.e., anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of an mRNA vaccine or any of the ingredients in the vaccine should not receive it. We can discuss any allergies or other health conditions you may have before you receive the vaccine. If necessary, we can seek input from an Allergist.
  
- **What about people with autoimmune or immune-compromised conditions?**
  - If you have an autoimmune or immunodeficiency condition, or are immunosuppressed due to disease or treatment, we can discuss the benefits and risks of vaccination given your particular situation. People with these conditions were not included in the trials for the currently available vaccines, although vaccination may still be a good idea for you to reduce your risk of infection.
  
- **Can people who have been vaccinated still spread the virus?**
  - It is possible that people who have been vaccinated can still spread the virus. And while the vaccine appears to offer very high immunity for those who have received both doses – again, up to 95% - it is still not 100% effective. That’s why it is important to continue with current safety protocols, like social distancing and wearing appropriate PPE until further public health measures can be eased.