

Information for people with cancer

March 19, 2021

NOTE: If you have or have had blood or bone marrow cancer, there is a separate information sheet for you on the [BCCDC website](#).

Why is planning for a COVID-19 vaccine important?

- Preparing for your vaccine is important because people with cancer may need to talk to their health care providers about timing their vaccination with their treatment or medications.
- It is very important that you monitor how you are feeling in the days leading up to your vaccine appointment. If you do not feel well, rebook for when you are feeling better.

Should I get a COVID-19 vaccine? Will the vaccine work for me?

- All of the COVID-19 vaccines available in Canada are safe, and they do not contain any live virus. The vaccines cannot give you COVID-19.
- Doctors and researchers have looked at the evidence. They agree that unless you have a very serious allergy to any of the vaccine ingredients, you should strongly consider getting a COVID-19 vaccine because you have a higher chance of experiencing severe symptoms if you get COVID-19.
- People with cancer weren't included in the clinical trials of the COVID-19 vaccines. While the COVID-19 vaccines are very safe, we do not know exactly how much protection they will give people with cancer compared to those who do not have cancer.
- However, the way the vaccines work means that there is a strong chance that your immune system will learn to protect you, to some degree, from COVID-19.

What about the medications or treatments that I take?

Some medications and treatments for cancer affect how well your immune system responds to the COVID-19 vaccine. Timing your vaccine around your treatment may help the vaccine work best.

Not all people with cancer need to time the vaccine around their treatment or medications. Please read the section below. If you are still not sure when to get your vaccine, please call the care provider you **most recently saw** for your cancer treatment or follow-up. This may be your family doctor, nurse practitioner, oncologist, hematologist, or other.

- If you are on treatment or your treatment needs to start before you can get the vaccine, **do not delay your cancer treatment.** Book your vaccine as soon as you can.
- If you know that you will be scheduled for more than one cancer treatment, for example chemotherapy given every 3 or 4 weeks, try and book your vaccine one week before your next treatment.
- If you are receiving a course of radiation treatment, there are usually no special instructions for timing the vaccine. For patients with larger fields (areas of the body) having radiation therapy, you may need blood work before your vaccine. If you are having radiation close to one of your arms, you should get the vaccine in your other arm. If you have questions, please speak to your radiation oncologist.
- If you are having both chemotherapy and radiation, please follow the chemotherapy instructions in this list.
- If you are taking systemic corticosteroids, such as dexamethasone, try to book your vaccine 28 days after your last dose of corticosteroids. Corticosteroids may lower your immune response to the vaccine. However, if this is not possible, you can still book your vaccine.

If you don't see your medication listed, or if you take medications for another condition and you aren't sure if you need to consider timing, you can also look at the [COVID-19 vaccine planning considerations](#) on the BCCDC website for that condition (if available), and/or call 8-1-1 or talk to your health-care provider.

How else should I plan for my vaccine appointment?

- Review HealthLink BC's general information on [COVID-19 vaccines](#).
- It is important that you are feeling as well as possible when you get your vaccine. However, some people with cancer have chronic symptoms, like a cough or pain.
- In the 2-3 days leading up to your vaccine, monitor yourself: are any of your symptoms new or getting worse? If you aren't feeling like your usual self, rebook your vaccine appointment for another day. You won't lose your place in line. Consider reaching out to your health care provider about your worsening symptoms.
- You can feel safe going to the COVID-19 vaccine clinic, as they are following all COVID-19 safety precautions.

What or who should I bring with me?

- Please bring your BC Services Card or CareCard to your appointment.
- You can bring any medical or mobility equipment that you need.
- If you need to, you can bring a trusted friend, family member or caregiver with you to support you through the process and/or translate for you as needed. Please only bring one person.

What happens after my vaccine?

- Everyone who gets a COVID-19 vaccine will stay on location to be monitored for 15 minutes after they get their vaccine.
- You should tell a health-care provider at the vaccination site if you do not feel well.
- If you have any new or worsening symptoms once you go home, please call your health care team or 8-1-1. If you have a severe allergic reaction, call 9-1-1 immediately.
- Everyone will have to continue following COVID-19 safe practices for a while, even after getting their vaccine. You can learn more about what to expect after your vaccine [on the BCCDC website](#).

My vaccine planning checklist

- Read the COVID-19 vaccine information for my condition(s)
- Time my vaccine appointment around my medication and treatments (if relevant to me)
- Talk to my doctor if I have any questions or need any help planning my medication
- Monitor how I'm feeling leading up to my vaccination appointment. Is anything new or getting worse compared to how I usually feel?
- Make sure I am feeling my usual self on the day of my vaccine appointment
- Plan to bring the medical and mobility equipment I need with me