COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions for Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes

Information is accurate as of February 16, 2021 and subject to change

For more information, please visit: OttawaPublicHealth.ca/COVID19Vaccine

1. How are decisions being made between OPH, the City’s Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and the province about vaccine scheduling and prioritization?

To guide decision-making and sequencing, the provincial government has provided OPH with an ethical framework for COVID-19 vaccine distribution. The framework evaluates the patient population risk of exposure, the risk of severe disease or outcomes and health system capacity to ensure ongoing care to the population. While there is limited number of vaccines available, the vaccine distribution framework helps guide decisions to ensure equitable distribution.

A local Vaccine Sequence Strategy Task Force, which includes members from groups highly affected by COVID, such as newcomers, Indigenous, Black, older adult, and healthcare workers has been established to advise the EOC on how to implement the sequence of vaccines given local context including maximizing uptake among groups sequenced ahead of others.

2. Will we have to be vaccinated against COVID-19 every year like the influenza (flu) vaccine?

There is not enough information to say whether a COVID-19 vaccine will be needed each year. As we learn more about the COVID-19 virus and more people are vaccinated in the community, experts will be able to determine the need for more COVID-19 vaccines in the future.

3. Why would I want to get the COVID-19 vaccine if we are still required to follow public health measures such as physical distancing and mask use even after vaccination?

The main reason to get vaccinated is to protect your own health. Vaccines add a valuable layer of protection against COVID-19 infection which can lead to severe illness and death. More people vaccinated means fewer COVID-19 infections in the community. This is important in helping to reduce the burden on the health care system. This would mean less people in the hospital, less patients in ICU and more capacity for hospitals to resume surgeries and treatments.

At this time, we do not know if the vaccine prevents people from getting COVID-19, that they could then pass on to others. What we have learned from other vaccines is when more people are vaccinated and immune, this should eventually mean a higher likelihood of indirect protection to those who are not immune to the disease.
4. **Once a person is vaccinated with the series of two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, can they stop following public health measures like wearing a mask, physical distancing and self-isolating when they become sick?**

No. While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it will be important for everyone to continue practicing public health measures to help stop the spread of COVID-19. That means covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often and never touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands, staying at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from others and self-isolating when sick.

Health care and other staff must still wear personal protective equipment (PPE) when working, even after they have been vaccinated.

COVID-19 vaccination along with public health measures will offer the best protection from the spread of COVID-19. Experts need to understand more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide before deciding to change the recommendations everyone should take to slow the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. Other factors, including how many people get vaccinated and how the virus is spreading in communities, will also affect this decision.

5. **How long can we expect public health measures to be in place after COVID-19 vaccination in the community?**

It is not known at this time. As we know public health measures such as mask wearing, physical distancing and hand washing help to limit the spread of COVID-19. Individual public health measures will be strongly recommended for as long as they are needed. Measures in place at businesses and schools could be lifted over time depending on levels of community transmission.