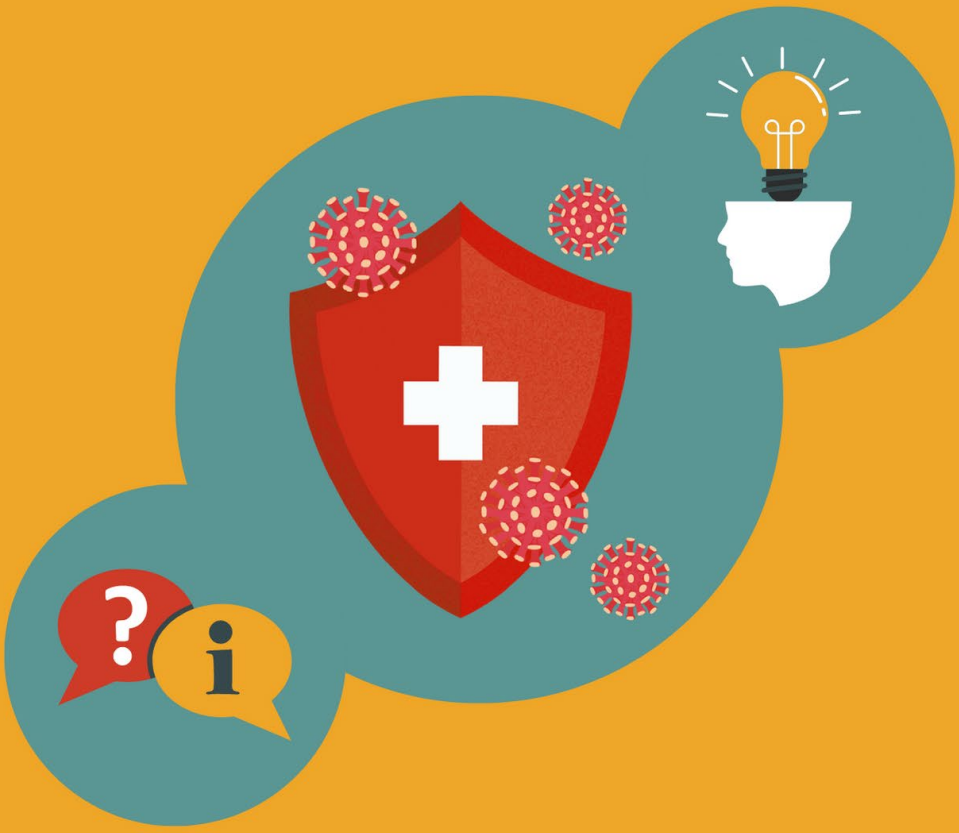
# Making Informed Choices About COVID-19 Vaccines



Made by the ADVANCE Study

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

UNLOCKING THE GATES SERVICES SOCIETY

BC MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES
Provincial Health Services Authority

This booklet was created through the "**A**ddressing COVI**D**-19 **V**accine concerns **A**mo**N**g people who are in**C**arc**E**rated" (**ADVANCE**) Study.

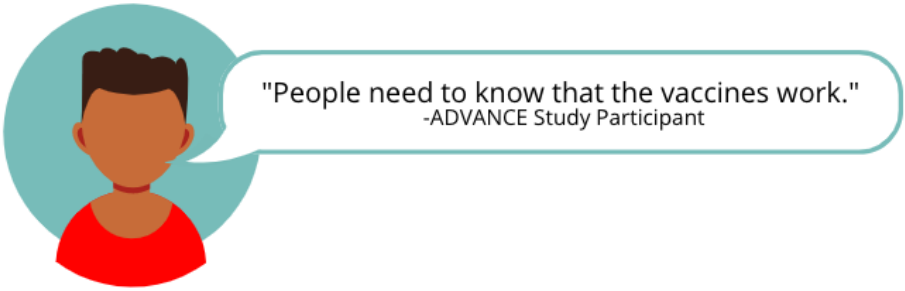
The ADVANCE Study team co-developed educational resources (including this one) with and for PWAI. We asked **P**eople **W**ho **A**re **I**ncarcerated (**PWAI** for short) in BC provincial correctional centres what their concerns about COVID-19 vaccines are, what it's been like being incarcerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how they like to get information about things like COVID-19 and vaccines.

We want PWAI in provincial correctional centres in BC to have access to the information that they need to make informed decisions about COVID-19, and to stay as safe and healthy as possible while incarcerated. We hope this helps you think about what would work best for you and to make informed choices about your health and wellness.

Check out our other resources, listed below. You can ask for a copy from a Programs Officer or from Healthcare Staff:

- Making Informed Choices: A COVID-19 Activity and Info Book
- Making Informed Choices About COVID-19 Vaccines
- Wellness While in Custody
- What You Need to Know About COVID-19 Testing
- Planning for Release
- Overdose Prevention & Harm Reduction
- COVID-19 FAQ Posters
- COVID-19 Myth Busting Posters
- Real Talk Comic
- Needle Hate Comic
- Making Informed Choices: A COVID-19 Activity and Info Book (Reference Edition)

# COVID-19 Vaccines



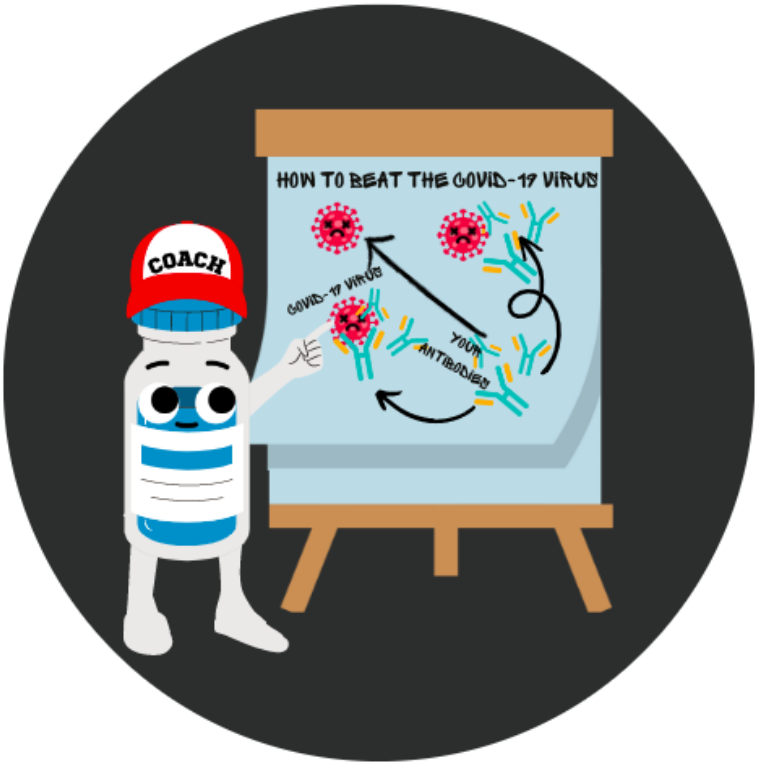

This booklet answers common questions about COVID -19 vaccines from people who are incarcerated across BC.

## How Do COVID -19 Vaccines Work?

There are a few different types of COVID -19 vaccines. In Canada, Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are used the most, beca use they're the most effective and have the least side effects. Both are ***mRNA vaccines***. mRNA vaccines work by showing your body how to make a protein (called an antigen), that is similar to a protein on the COVID-19 virus. The protein is harmless on its own.

When you get vaccinated, your body makes this protein and uses it to train fighte r cells. Those cells produce a special type of armour called antibodies. These antibodies are specially designed to target the antigen in the vaccine. After being vaccinated, if the real SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 enters your body, the antibodie s you made will be able to block and bind to the virus, stopping it from infecting your cells and making you sick.

You can think of it like training to face off against an opposing team in a sport. The vaccine is the coach that trains your body to beat the opposing team (the COVID -19 virus).




When your body is trained, it increases your chance of winning the match against the actual COVID-19 virus, and makes winning much easier.

## Natural Immunity Isn't Enough

While our bodies have some 'natural' ability to protect us from viruses, these defences are not a guarantee. People who have had COVID-19 will have some prot ection from the virus, but it may not last very long, may not protect against different variants, and may come at a cost. Some people who have had COVID -19 have developed long term health issues.

Getting vaccinated, even if it's after you've had COVID -19, lowers your chances of getting sick again in the future.

## What Protection Do Vaccines Provide?

Vaccines **significantly** lower your chances of:

- Getting really sick from the virus
- Going to the hospital for COVID-19
- Dying from COVID-19

How much protection you have depends on:

- How many COVID-19 vaccine doses you've had (more shots = more protection)
- Time since your last shot (protection starts to wear off after 6 months)
- The variant you're exposed to
- Your unique immune system

## Other Benefits of Being Vaccinated

Being vaccinated can prevent:

- Getting sick and having to go to medical isolation
- Having to take time off work
- Anxiety in big groups, when travelling, or doing fun activities (outside of custody)
- Other people from getting sick
- New variants from developing

# What Are the Ingredients in COVID -19 Vaccines?

Vaccines are made up of several parts.

**Antigens** are the main, active component in COVID -19 vaccines. Antigens mimic a part of the virus (a protein) to trigger an immun e response.

**Stabilisers** to prevent different ingredients in the vaccine from combining. Sugars, amino acids, gelatin, and proteins are all used as stabilisers.

**Surfactants** keep the vaccine together and stop the separation of ingredients, which can lead to sediment or clumps forming.

**Lipids** are simply fats. They protect the essential parts of the vaccine and ensure they're delivered into our bodies undamaged.

**Diluent** is the liquid used to get the vaccine to the right concentration. This makes up most of the vaccine. Usually, the vaccine diluent is sterile water.

In BC, the most commonly used are **Moderna Spikevax®** , **Moderna Spikevax® Bivalent** , **Pfizer -BioNTech Comirnaty®** . Let's take a closer look at the ingredients in the Moderna vaccine in the chart on the next page.

| Ingredients | Type |
| --- | --- |
| Messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) sequence for SARS-CoV-2 original strain | Antigen |
| ● SM-102<br>● Cholesterol | Lipid |
| ● Polyethylene glycol<br>● 2000 dimyristoyl glycerol<br>● 1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine | Surfactant |
| ● Tromethamine<br>● Tromethamine hydrochloride<br>● Acetic acid<br>● Sodium acetate<br>● Sucrose | Stabiliser |
| Water | Diluent |

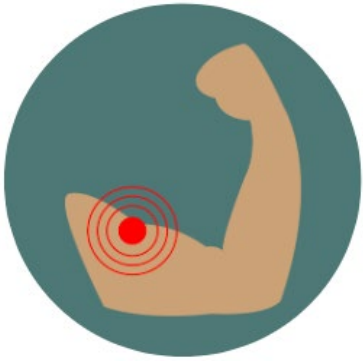
Some of these ingredients might sound strange, but they're actually quite common. They're used in other medications and can often be found in natural sources. For example, Tromethamine is used in treatment of some heart conditions, and also in lotions. Acetic acid occurs naturally in vinegar.

# Side Effects and Vaccine Safety

Side effects are the unwanted effects of a medication.

## Common Side Effects After COVID -19 Vaccination

- Pain at the injection site
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Fever
- Chills
- Joint pain
- Redness or swelling at injection site
- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting




These side effects can be a sign that the vaccine is working. But not having side effects doesn't mean the vaccine didn't work. Everyone responds differently!

You are more likely to have many of these effects as a result of COVID-19 infection than as a result of a COVID-19 vaccine. For example, it's much more likely that you'll feel deeply tired as a result of getting COVID-19 than it is that you'll feel deeply tired as a result of getting vaccinated.

# Serious Side Effects After COVID -19 Vaccination

Serious side effects from COVID -19 vaccines are rare. There have been over 12.2 million COVID -19 vaccine doses given in BC, and only 456 serious side effects. That is 3.7 per 100,000 do ses given.

To get an idea of what that looks like, imagine a few medium - sized bags of rice (2kg bags).


3.7 in 100,000 would be equal to 4 grains of rice out of 6.5 kg.

That's just 4 grains in 3 ¼ of those 2 kg rice bags.

For more details on serious side effects, check out our other resources.

# COVID-19 Vaccine Booster Shots

Booster shots are given when protection decreases over time. There are many vaccines that require booster shots, like tetanus and whooping cough. T here are also many vaccines that require multiple shots to build full protection, such as the hepatitis B virus vaccine and human papillomavirus vaccine that prevents cervical cancer.

Getting a booster shot kick starts your body into making new fighter cells, so you can stay protected. Booster shots can also help to keep you safe from new COVID -19 variants, by training your immune system to fight them off.

To have full protection against COVID-19 infection , the recommendation is to receive a COVID-19 booster shot every 6 or more months from the last COVID-19 vaccine dose you received, or whenever you last had SARS-CoV-2 infection (if applicable ), whichever is longer . Boosters are extra important for people with health conditions that put them at higher risk from COVID-19, and for people who care for them , so some people may be recommended to have a booster shot more frequently than every 6 months .

## How to Get Vaccinated

To get vaccinated **while in custody** , submit a healthcare request to Correctional Health Services. You can request to see a doctor or nurse Monday to Friday.

To get vaccinated **in the community** , register online at https://www.getvacc inated.gov.bc.ca/s/ or by phone at 1 -833-838-2323. Correctional Health Services can help you register before you're released.

## Is Being Vaccinated Against COVID -19 Mandatory?

As of November 2022, being vaccinated against COVID -19 is not mandatory.

You don't need proof of COVID -19 vaccination to access businesses, events or services in BC anymore. People travelling to Canada don't have to provide proof of vaccination.

As of July 2023, there are some situations where you still have to provide proof of vaccination, including:

- Working in long-term care and assisted living or Healthcare
- Living in some recovery homes and other drug treatment or addiction centres

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