COVID-19 Vaccines
Vaccinations for COVID-19 are on the horizon and many members of the University Community understandably have questions. While there remains many unknowns for the largest public health vaccination campaign in history, this document will attempt to provide clarification based on the best available information from public health authorities, of which this document is heavily based.

No part of this document is intended to represent medical advice or consultation. Members of the University Community are encouraged to speak with their medical practitioner for individualized guidance.

1. What is the University’s position on vaccines?
The University of Ottawa is highly encouraging its community be vaccinated, when they are eligible under their health unit’s vaccination roll out.

In certain circumstances (such as working around a vulnerable population), proof of vaccination may be required to protect both parties.

2. How do I know the vaccine safe and effective?
Approved vaccines have been rigorously reviewed by Health Canada. Clinical trials indicate a high level of safety and protection from COVID-19 for all of the approved vaccines in Canada.

3. How were the vaccines approved for use in Canada so quickly?
Vaccines were developed in large part to the global cooperation of researchers, manufacturers and governments. COVID-19 vaccines were approved quickly not because safety standards were lowered or changed, rather because Health Canada shortened the administrative process of vaccine authorization (e.g. concurrent review). The safety requirements in clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccine were just as strict as the regular process for any other vaccine.

4. Why should I be vaccinated?
Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to protect an individual and reduce the impact of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. There is no way to know how COVID-19 may affect you, even if you are not at increased risk of severe complications. Vaccination helps protect you by creating an antibody response without having to experience the severe illness of COVID-19.

5. What if I cannot take the vaccine because of personal health matters or beliefs?
The more people who can safely take the vaccine, the greater the likelihood of herd immunity. Individuals with pre-existing or personal conditions should discuss their individual situations with their medical practitioner.
6. Can people who have already tested positive for COVID-19 get a COVID-19 vaccine?
Yes. Those who have previously tested positive for COVID-19 can still be vaccinated and people do not need COVID-19 testing prior to vaccination. COVID-19 presents severe health risks and re-infection is possible. At this time, medical experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19.

7. Can the vaccine cause a COVID-19 infection?
No, none of the currently approved vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson) use live COVID-19 virus. There are other vaccine candidates in development using multiple technologies.

8. How do the vaccines work?
Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are mRNA vaccines. These vaccines contain the instructions for making a protein that is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. The vaccine triggers the immune system to make antibodies against COVID-19. Once immunity is developed, if the real COVID-19 virus enters the body, the antibodies will help fight the infection and reduce severity of the illness.

The AstraZeneca and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines are a viral vector-based vaccine, using a harmless adenovirus as a delivery system. Adenoviruses are like the virus that causes the common cold. The vaccine contains the vector virus which produces the protein that is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. The body is able to build a strong immune response against COVID-19 without exposing you to the virus that causes COVID-19. Once immunity is developed, if the real COVID-19 virus enters the body, the antibodies will help fight the infection and reduce severity of the illness.

9. Can the mRNA vaccine alter a person’s DNA?
No. The mRNA from a COVID-19 vaccine never enters the nucleus of the cell, which is where DNA is located. This means the mRNA does not affect or interact with our DNA in any way. Instead, COVID-19 vaccines that use mRNA work with the body’s natural defenses to safely develop an immune response to disease.

10. After receiving the vaccine, how long does it take to build an immunity?
It usually takes the body a few weeks to build immunity after receiving a vaccine. It is possible that someone could become infected with the COVID-19 virus before or just after getting the vaccine and get sick. This happens because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection in the body.

11. Can I still transmit the virus after receiving the vaccine?
Studies of COVID-19 vaccines have shown that they are very effective at preventing people from becoming sick with COVID-19. However, right now there is not enough information to show how likely it
is that someone who has been given a COVID-19 vaccine can develop an asymptomatic (no symptoms) COVID-19 infection and pass it to others.

12. Will I still need to follow existing public health measures after I’ve been vaccinated?
While there is early evidence suggesting that the vaccine may also reduce COVID-19 transmission, NACI is recommending that everyone continue to practice public health measures (e.g. wearing a face mask and physical distancing) regardless of whether or not they received a COVID-19 vaccine. More information on the vaccine’s ability to reduce COVID-19 transmission is expected in the near future.

13. What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?
The most frequent side effects are injection site pain, fatigue and headache. Some people who got the vaccine in trials also reported muscle pain, chills, joint pain and fever. These symptoms were usually mild or moderate and went away within a few days. These are all expected reactions to vaccines because of the immune response. They are very similar to those reported following the seasonal influenza vaccination. More information on the side effects for each vaccine is available online:

- Pfizer-BioNTech
- Moderna
- AstraZeneca
- Johnson & Johnson

14. When can I receive a COVID-19 vaccine?
Vaccines are being rolled out in phases with vaccinations dependent on supply and type of vaccines received. At-risk populations are being prioritized based on the NACI recommendations. Ottawa residents can check their vaccine eligibility on the Ottawa Public Health website.

15. Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?
Ottawa Public Health is rolling out vaccines through community clinics across the city. Ottawa Public Health will also be running pop-up and mobile vaccination teams throughout the city.

16. Which vaccine will I receive?
Due to supply chain and delivery schedules, a choice of vaccine is not currently available. All approved vaccines are safe and effective.

17. Will there be a vaccination clinic on campus?
University representatives are in continual contact with Ottawa Public Health regarding public health measures and vaccinations. While these efforts include planning for a potential vaccination site, the supply of vaccine remains the most critical element. The University is open to a vaccination clinic on campus, if so appropriate and if vaccine supply is available.
18. Will I need to show proof of vaccination before returning to campus?
There are no plans to require proof of vaccination in order to return to campus. However, the University – as an employer – has a duty under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to ensure a healthy and safe workplace and will be strongly encouraging its community to take the vaccine as a layer of protection against COVID-19.

19. What if I do not want to take the vaccine?
The vaccine is not mandatory and workers are free to choose if they wish to be vaccinated. The University will be strongly encouraging vaccination of its community. The University remains responsible for providing a healthy and safe work environment and will strive to ensure the protection of its community, including from COVID-19.

20. Can my supervisor ask me if I’ve been vaccinated?
You are not obligated to disclose vaccination status to your supervisor.

21. If I’m concerned that my work colleagues are not vaccinated. Can I refuse to perform work on this basis?
All workers have the right to refuse unsafe work. The University has a duty to ensure a healthy and safe workplace and to provide accommodations appropriate in the circumstances. Appropriate measures in accordance with public health requirements will be instituted to ensure the protection of the University Community.

If a worker continues to have concerns following management’s intervention in the matter, they are invited to consult with the resources on campus, including:

- Their direct supervisor;
- Union/association;
- Health and safety committee

22. If I receive the COVID-19 vaccine and experience symptoms afterwards that are similar to COVID-19, do I need to get tested?
Individuals who receive a COVID-19 vaccination, may experience vaccine reactions that produce symptoms that are also symptoms of COVID-19, such as:

- Fever and/or chills
- Feeling tired
- Headache or body aches and/or joint pain
- Nausea

If symptoms resolve within 24 hours of being vaccinated for COVID-19 it is reasonable to manage these symptoms as a vaccination reaction. Individuals can end self-isolation 24 hours after symptoms have improved. However, individuals should seek testing for COVID-19 as soon as possible if:

- Symptom(s) develop more than 48 hours after vaccination
- Symptom(s) persist or worsen for more than 48 hours after the first symptom onset
The symptomatic individual has had close contact with a case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days
Or
Symptoms are judged by a health care provider to be severe and/or not in keeping with a COVID-19 vaccination reaction

Ottawa Public Health continues to recommend that anyone with symptom(s) of COVID-19 consult with a health care provider if they have questions or concerns.

Additional resources

- Ottawa Public Health
- Public Health Ontario
- Government of Canada