

COVID-19 mRNA Vaccine Information for Children six months to four years old

Public Health - Factsheet for
Parents and Guardians

December 2023

Manitoba 

Immunization is one of the most important accomplishments in public health. Over the past 50 years, immunization has led to the elimination, containment and control of diseases that were once very common in Canada.¹ Vaccines help our immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

The factsheet is meant for individuals aged 6 months to 4 years who are getting the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine.

COVID-19 vaccine recommendations are different for children who are moderately to severely immunocompromised. If your child is moderately to severely immunocompromised due to disease (e.g., organ transplant, leukemia) or treatment (e.g., chemotherapy, high-dose steroids), or has an autoimmune condition, please refer to the factsheet titled, "COVID-19 Vaccine: Information for Individuals who have an autoimmune condition and/or are immunocompromised" available at manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/resources.html.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a virus in the coronavirus family. The virus that causes COVID-19 can spread from person to person through respiratory droplets and aerosols from someone infected with the virus. Respiratory droplets and aerosols are made when we do every day things like talk, cough, breathe, sneeze or sing. COVID-19 may also spread by touching something that has the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands. Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness, but the virus can affect different people in different ways. Some will become seriously ill and require medical attention.

Up-to-date data on COVID-19 in Manitoba is available at: www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/surveillance/covid-19/index.html.

Does COVID-19 affect young children?

While most children who get COVID-19 have no symptoms or experience only mild symptoms, some become very sick requiring care in the hospital. Children with underlying medical conditions may be at an increased risk of experiencing serious illness. Children who have been infected with COVID-19 are at risk of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C), a rare but serious complication of COVID-19 infection. Children with MIS-C usually require admission to hospital.

Children may also experience symptoms consistent with post-COVID-19 condition (also referred to as long COVID). While it appears that children have a lower risk of post-COVID-19 condition compared to adults, research is ongoing about the frequency and severity of post-COVID-19 condition in children.

What is the updated formulation of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine?

Updated formulations of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines have been developed to protect against the XBB.1.5 strain of the COVID-19 virus. They have been approved for use in:

- Individuals 6 months and older who have never received a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Individuals 6 months and older who have already received a COVID-19 vaccine and need one or more additional doses to complete their primary series.
- Individuals 6 months and older who have completed a primary series with COVID-19 vaccines and are recommended to receive an additional dose for fall 2023.

¹ The Public Health Agency of Canada

Should my child get a dose of the updated formulation of the COVID-19 vaccine if they have already received more than one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine before?

Evidence suggests that the protection provided by the COVID-19 vaccine decreases over time. An additional dose with the updated formulation is offered to restore protection that may have decreased over time.

Beginning in the fall of 2023 for those previously vaccinated against COVID-19, individuals aged 6 months and older are recommended to receive a dose of the new formulation of COVID-19 vaccine. The recommended interval is 6 months, but your child may receive a dose of XBB.1.5 formulation if it has been at least 3 months from any previous COVID-19 vaccine formulation or known infection.

Immunization is particularly important for those at increased risk of COVID-19 infection or severe disease, for example:

- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Residents of long-term care homes and other congregate living settings
- Individuals with [underlying medical conditions](#) that place them at higher risk of severe COVID-19
- Individuals who are pregnant
- Individuals in or from First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities
- Members of racialized and other equity-deserving communities
- People who provide essential community services

Is the COVID-19 vaccine for children six months to four years of age the same as the COVID-19 vaccines given to older children?

Generally speaking, yes. The mRNA vaccines used for younger children have a lower dose than the vaccine dose given to older children, teens and adults.

Is the mRNA vaccine safe?

Yes, the mRNA vaccines are safe. In general, the side effects observed during the clinical trials were similar to other vaccines. The side effects were generally mild or moderate, and went away a few days after vaccination. They included things like:

- pain, redness and swelling at the site of injection
- irritability and crying
- sleepiness
- fever
- loss of appetite

These are common side effects of the vaccine and are not a risk to your child's health. Over-the-counter medicines like acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g., Advil®) may be considered to help manage these adverse events (like pain or fever, respectively), if they occur after vaccination.

Acetylsalicylic Acid (e.g., Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.

As with all vaccines, more serious side effects are possible. However, these are rare.

Allergic reactions generally happen shortly after the vaccine is administered. **That is why all children, teens and adults are routinely observed for a minimum of 15 minutes after immunization.** Your child may need to stay in the clinic for 30 minutes if they have had a serious allergic reaction to a vaccine in the past. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. Very rarely, this can happen hours after getting vaccinated. **If this happens after you and your child leave the immunization clinic, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department or health centre for immediate attention.**

Report any serious or unexpected adverse reactions to a health care provider, or call Health Links-Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 (toll free in Manitoba).

For a full list of possible side effects, please review the vaccine manufacturer's product monograph at manitoba.ca/vaccine/resources or speak with your immunizer or health care provider.

Who should NOT get the mRNA vaccine?

- Children who experienced myocarditis/pericarditis after the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine
- People with children who have a history of myocarditis unrelated to COVID-19 vaccine should consult their clinical team prior to vaccination. This is a precautionary measure until more information is available. People who would prefer not to wait for their child to get their second dose should talk to their immunizer or health care provider about the risks and benefits of proceeding with vaccination.
- Children with a history of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) until clinical recovery or until 90 days since diagnosis, whichever is longer.
- Children who are allergic to an active substance or any ingredient of the COVID-19 vaccine OR had a severe allergic reaction after their first dose.

Your child would need an allergy referral before vaccination.

There are two ingredients in the mRNA vaccines that are potential allergens known to cause possible allergic reactions, including serious reactions:

1. Polyethylene glycol (PEG) may be found in a multitude of products including bowel preparation products for colonoscopies, laxatives, cough syrup, cosmetics, contact lens care solutions, skin care products, specific medications and as an additive in some food and drinks. Children with PEG allergies may also be allergic to polysorbate 80.
2. Tromethamine (trometamol or Tris) may be found in certain medications and some contrast material (CT dye). If your child had an allergic reaction after receiving CT dye or are allergic specifically to tromethamine, regardless of the severity of reaction, speak with your health care provider before immunization.

For information about any of the COVID-19 vaccine ingredients, please review the vaccine manufacturer's product monograph at manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/resources.html or speak with your child's immunizer or health care provider.

Your child can be immunized if they have allergies not related to the vaccine, such as allergies to foods, medications, insect stings or seasonal/environmental allergies. Talk to your child's immunizer or health care provider about all of their allergies before vaccination.

It is recommended that children with a fever or other symptoms that could be due to COVID-19, or who have been infected with COVID-19 wait four weeks after infection (from the start of symptoms or the date of their positive test) before getting a next dose of vaccine. Children who are moderately to severely immunocompromised may use a shorter interval (i.e., four to eight weeks). But at a minimum, they need to wait until their symptoms are gone and the recommended isolation period is over.

If your child has completed the primary series but was infected with COVID-19 (e.g., confirmed by a positive PCR test or rapid antigen test (RAT)), the recommended interval is 6 months, but your child may receive a dose of XBB.1.5 formulation if it has been at least 3 months from any previous infection.

Your child's record of protection

All immunizations, including the COVID-19 vaccine, are recorded on your child's immunization record in Manitoba's immunization registry. This registry:

- allows health care providers to find out which immunizations your child has received or needs to have
- may be used to produce immunization records or notify you or your health care provider if a particular immunization has been missed
- allows Manitoba Health as well as public health officials to monitor how well vaccines work in preventing disease

The Personal Health Information Act protects your child's information and the information for any people you provide care for. You can choose to have this personal health information hidden from health care providers. For additional information, please contact your local public health office or speak with a health care provider.

For information and to obtain your child's Manitoba immunization record please contact your local public health office: : www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html

For information and to obtain a Pan-Canadian Proof of Vaccination Credential (PVC), go to manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine/immunization_record/residents.html

Where can I find more information?

For more information about COVID-19 or the COVID-19 vaccines, talk to your health care provider. You can also call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at **204-788-8200** or **1-888-315-9257** (toll free in Manitoba).

Or visit:

Province of Manitoba: manitoba.ca/covid19/index.html

Government of Canada: canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html
