

# Expanding the vaccination program: Information for hospital staff and physicians in Hamilton

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Updated: January 8, 2021

Question	Response
When will COVID vaccinations happen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first Hamilton clinic, administering the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, began operating on December 23.</li> <li>• So far, approximately 2400 healthcare workers have received the vaccine. Most are from long-term care (LTC) facilities and retirement homes (RH), while approximately 300 are from Hamilton's two hospital systems.</li> <li>• <b>We are now in the process of greatly expanding access to the vaccine for staff and physicians (including residents) from HHS and SJHH.</b></li> <li>• <b>It's important to note that everyone who wishes to get the vaccine will get it.</b></li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Read more about the new vaccine.</a></p>
Why should I get vaccinated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting vaccinated can help reduce the chance of getting ill with COVID and the possibility of severe medical complications from the infection</li> <li>• Stopping this pandemic needs all the tools we have available.</li> <li>• Getting vaccinated can help protect the people around us – our patients, our co-workers and our families – and benefit the whole community</li> <li>• There was extensive testing of the vaccine and thorough review of all the clinical trial results, especially safety, before Health Canada authorized its emergency use</li> <li>• No serious side effects have been reported.</li> <li>• The first studies of this vaccine have shown that if anyone gets vaccinated with the full dose series, they have a 95% lower chance of getting COVID infection than those who don't who don't get the vaccine.</li> </ul>
When can I get vaccinated? How can I sign up?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are implementing a plan this week, to increase the number of hospital staff and physicians/residents who get vaccinated.</li> <li>• We are asking every healthcare worker in hospitals to sign up today to be put into the queue for a randomization process for getting the vaccine.</li> <li>• Staff and physicians will be put in sequencing groups, following provincial guidelines based on their risk of exposure at work, and on the risk to the patients they care for.</li> <li>• Find out what <a href="#">units and/or roles are including in each group</a> so you can sign up online.</li> <li>• You can <a href="#">sign up online now.</a></li> <li>• It's important to note that everyone who wishes to get the vaccine will get it.</li> </ul>
How do I use the online sign-up form for a vaccine appointment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Click here for a tipsheet</a> on how to sign-up online for a vaccine appointment.</li> <li>• If you have any questions, please email <a href="mailto:vaccinesignupsupport@stjoes.ca">vaccinesignupsupport@stjoes.ca</a>.</li> </ul>

What's the timeline for this expanded vaccination effort?

- Over the next month, more HCW are expected to gain access to the Pfizer vaccine, as the LTC and RH vaccination strategy gets completed and other vaccines become available.
- We expect that those in the first group will receive the vaccine in January, starting this week.
- Staff and physicians in the second group will be vaccinated in January/February, those in the third and fourth group in February/March.
- **This is based on available supplies of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and may be subject to change.**
- Since the vaccine is being administered through a Hamilton Public Health clinic, staff should NOT contact Employee Health Services, or their manager/Head of service or Chief, as they have no additional information.

Who decides who gets the vaccine first?

- Provincial guidelines determine who gets the vaccine first. The Ontario government has determined that people who are more vulnerable or at higher risk of infection and serious illness will be prioritized. Early doses of the vaccine will be available for:
- residents, staff, essential caregivers and other employees who work in congregate living settings, such as long-term care homes, providing care for seniors (an essential caregiver could be a family member)
  - health care workers (HCW)(including hospital employees, physicians, residents, other staff who work or study in hospitals, and other health care personnel. Additional guidance was provided regarding the prioritization of HCW).
  - adults in First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations where infection can have disproportionate consequences, including those living in remote or isolated areas where risk of transmission is high
  - adult recipients of chronic home health care

Read [Ontario's vaccination implementation plan](#) for more information.

How does this sequencing apply to hospitals?

- The Province has identified the following acute care areas as those of highest risk.
- HCW who work in or support these areas should be given access to vaccination first as more doses become available:
  - COVID-19 units
  - Critical care units/critical care response teams
  - Emergency departments
  - General internal medicine units
  - COVID-19 assessment centres
- Risk of exposure to COVID in the workplace has many facets, including:
  - Known/unknown COVID status of patients
  - Length of time spent with COVID patients
  - Nature of the interactions with COVID patients
  - PPE used routinely in patient encounters
  - Frequency of COVID patient interactions in a day/number of patients seen
  - Aerosol generating procedures with COVID patients: their frequency, the context (negative pressure room vs. regular room)

Why did some staff and physicians already get the Pfizer vaccine in this first phase?

- Ability of the COVID patients to comply with PPE
- Work/rotation schedule (days on and off in high risk COVID areas), etc.

- **Based on these principles and criteria, SJHH and HHS have come up with these [groups for sequencing vaccinations](#).**

- In the first phase, workers in long-term care settings caring for our most vulnerable populations were prioritized for vaccination following provincial direction.
- In the first two weeks of the vaccination program in Hamilton, while the clinic was gradually ramping up service over the holidays (Dec 23-Jan 4), there were a few doses left over some days after all scheduled LTC workers were vaccinated.
- To avoid “wasting” these “residual doses”, they were offered to staff and physicians working in the COVID medical unit and COVID ICU at the HGH as well as SJHH.
- These areas were chosen because of their proximity to the vaccination clinic and given workers in these units have high risk of exposure to COVID.
- As part of this vaccine waste avoidance plan, residual doses were offered to staff/physicians working on that day, based on most-to-least COVID patient exposure (as determined by those units), and using a process of randomization (lottery) if there were more staff who wanted the vaccine than there were doses available.
- The doses administered through this waste avoidance plan ranged from 0 to 14/hospital each day. Gradually more doses (up to 40/day) were made available to COVID medical and ICU staff in the first few days of January, if there were more spaces not filled by LTC staff.

How does the new process to offer the vaccine to more healthcare workers from hospitals work? When will I get mine?

- HHS and SJHH are committed to making vaccination available to any staff/physicians/residents who want it, as quickly as possible.
- We are asking staff/physicians/residents to indicate their interest in vaccination through an on-line tool available on the websites of both hospitals.
- A database of all HHS and SJHH volunteers will be created.
- Volunteers will be asked in the form to:
  - consent to the sharing of their contact information with clinic staff to schedule their vaccination
  - Attest that they belong to the sequencing group they have indicated
- The list of volunteers will be randomized via a computer code, within each group; staff/physicians/residents from the first group (with most risk) will be offered vaccination appointments first
- The clinic will call volunteers to offer a vaccination appointment for the next day (or two). If the HCW can't make the vaccination appointment that day, they will be randomized and offered vaccination another day.
- **NOTE: the call to book appointments will likely show up with a “NO CALLER ID”.**
- It is imperative that everyone commits to attending their scheduled appointment to ensure that we do not waste any opportunity to vaccinate our teams nor waste the actual vaccine.

I'm not in the first group, why should I sign up now?

- Regardless of where you are in the groups, we ask that you sign up now, since we want to go through these groups as quickly as possible, and may be adding those from other phases at any point.
- On a daily basis, the automated system will randomly pull individuals from lower groups as needed to fill the clinic bookings.
- Additionally, there will continue to be residual doses of the vaccine at the end of each day, and we will be calling some individuals who identified themselves as wanting to be on the daily standby list, when they signed up on line.
- This list is to ensure there is no waste of the vaccine, so we vaccinate our hospital workers as quickly as possible.

If I'm selected, do I have to go? Is the vaccine mandatory?

- **Receiving the vaccine is voluntary.**
- We will ensure that those who choose not to receive the vaccine are not stigmatized or penalized.
- We will supply the necessary information about vaccination and consent to vaccination prior to their agreement to receive the vaccine.

What happens if I miss my appointment to receive the vaccine?

- If you are selected and do not accept the appointment, or miss the appointment, you will be put back into the randomized process.
- Some people will get appointments during their shifts, some will get them on their days off.
- We encourage everyone to take the appointment you are given to get the vaccine as quickly as possible.
- Units will support the timing of these appointments as much as possible. Please ensure you inform your manager or supervisor asap of the time of your booked appointment,
- Staff who have appointments during working hours are expected to attend their appointment and return to their unit as soon as possible.

If my appointment comes at a time when I'm off, do I get paid to go get vaccinated?

- No.
- Although we encourage you to attend an appointment that is made available to you, there is no requirement for you to attend on a day you are not working.
- You may opt to decline the appointment, and your name will go back into the randomization process for a future appointment.

Can I claim mileage for driving to my appointment?

- No.

What happens if I'm scheduled to be "off" on the day I'm supposed to receive the second dose of the vaccine?

- When someone accepts their appointment, they are also committing to an appointment at the same time 21 days later.
- This is regardless if they are working the day of dose 1 and off during dose 2.
- We will not be able to accommodate requests for moving around the date/time for the second appointment.

<p>What documents should I bring to my appointment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A scheduling email is sent 24 hours before the appointment as a reminder and includes the consent form for staff/physicians/residents to print, fill out and bring to the clinic. (forms are available on site)</li> <li>• A valid OHIP card</li> <li>• Hospital ID (if applicable)</li> </ul>
<p>Do I receive some sort of vaccine certificate once I get the injection?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recipients will be given a printed notification at the clinic for each dose they receive. Please print a copy of this notification and fax it to EHS/Occupational Health and Safety.</li> <li>• The provincial government will be issuing a “vaccination card” once individuals have received both doses of the vaccine</li> </ul>
<p>What do I do if in need to cancel my appointment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anyone wishing to cancel their vaccination appointment should contact: <a href="mailto:cancelvac@hhsc.ca">cancelvac@hhsc.ca</a></li> <li>• If you are selected and do not accept the appointment, miss or cancel the appointment, you will be put back into the randomized process.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<p>Where is the vaccination clinic located?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clinic is located at 293 Wellington Street.</li> <li>• It's near the Hamilton General Hospital and Barton Street.</li> </ul>
<p>Can I just show up at the clinic and hope to get any available vaccine?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NO.</b></li> <li>• The first clinic is not open to the general public and will be scheduled by appointment only.</li> <li>• Those healthcare workers from LTC facilities and hospitals, identified to receive the first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, will be contacted.</li> </ul>
<p>How do I get to the vaccination site? Where do I park? Is there transit?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on <a href="#">parking and transit can be found here.</a></li> <li>• Parking is free for staff/physicians/residents who have appointments at the vaccination clinic.</li> <li>• Hamilton's Public Transit drops off passengers at a stop very close to the clinic.</li> </ul>
<p>What about other hospital employees who don't fall into any of the priority groups? Those who work from home for example?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All hospital workers have been placed in one of four groups. Those who work from home are in group four.</li> </ul>
<p>What precautions are in place at the clinic to stop the spread of COVID-19?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone who enters the clinic is screened for COVID-19 upon entry.</li> <li>• All clinic personnel wear appropriate PPE.</li> <li>• All patients are handed medical-grade masks.</li> <li>• Physical distancing measures are in place.</li> </ul>
<p>How safe is this new vaccine?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only vaccines that Health Canada determines to be safe and effective will be approved for use in Canada and Ontario.</li> <li>• The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is the first vaccine authorized for COVID-19. It was put through an independent and thorough scientific review for safety, efficacy and quality.</li> </ul>

If I am allergic to something or I have other health issues, can I still get the vaccine?  
What about side effects?

- Primary care providers and patients can be confident. Standards of safety, efficacy, and quality have not been compromised to expedite the approval of COVID-19 vaccines.
- Health Canada oversight of COVID-19 vaccines has NOT stopped at approval.
- Health Canada will continuously monitor the vaccine's safety and effectiveness, including monitoring antibody effectiveness over time.
- Though the new vaccine is the first mRNA vaccine approved for use in humans, mRNA technology has been studied for decades and has been successfully used in drugs for some cancer treatments.

Read more about [vaccine approval process and safety](#).

Find out more in this [resources page](#) for clinicians.

- Anyone uncertain about whether or not they should get the vaccine because of health concerns should contact their primary care physician to determine if there are any issues with receiving the vaccine.
- Like all vaccines, the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine may cause side effects, most of which are mild or moderate and resolve within a few days after vaccination.
- Common side effects (may affect more than 1 in 10 people) include:
  - Pain at injection site
  - Fatigue
  - Headache
  - Muscle pain
  - Chills
  - Joint pain
  - Fever
- Rarely there have been reports of anaphylaxis (serious allergic reaction) to a component of the vaccine. There have been no deaths and all cases have been successfully managed with epinephrine, which is always available at vaccination clinics.

[Find out more about possible side effects.](#)

Does everyone in a high-risk area have to be vaccinated?

- Vaccination is highly recommended for all staff/physicians/residents for whom the vaccine is deemed safe.
- The goal is to have approximately 75% of all HHS/SJHH staff/physicians/residents vaccinated within the next few months to protect our people and our community.
- HHS and SJHH are committed to making the vaccine available to all staff/physicians/residents who want it over the coming months.
- Receiving the vaccine is **voluntary**.
- Volunteers will provide appropriate **informed consent** to receive the vaccine.
- Those who choose *not* to receive the vaccine will not be stigmatized or penalized.
- These decisions are confidential and based on a personal assessment of risk and benefit.

Who should not get the vaccine?

- The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is contraindicated for:
  - Individuals with a history of anaphylaxis after previous administration of the vaccine.
  - Persons with proven immediate or anaphylactic hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine or its container, including polyethylene glycol.
  - Vaccination should be deferred in symptomatic individuals with confirmed or suspected SARS-CoV-2 infection, or those with symptoms of COVID-19.

Should pregnant staff or physician get the vaccine? What about if they are breastfeeding?

The current medical directive applicable to the vaccination clinic indicates that pregnant HCW or those who are breastfeeding, can receive the vaccine, based on informed consent and discussions with their physician. [Please click here to read the SOGC Statement on COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy.](#)

Should staff who are immunocompromised or who have an autoimmune disorder get the vaccine? What happens if I develop side effects after I've received the vaccine? Will I have to self isolate?

- The current medical directive applicable to the vaccination clinic indicates that HCW who are immunocompromised or who have an autoimmune disorder, can receive the vaccine, based on informed consent and discussions with their physician.

- **First, you cannot get COVID from the vaccine!**
- Symptoms such as soreness at the injection site, headache, muscle aches, feeling feverish or fatigued are common side-effects from the vaccine and usually resolve completely within 48 hours.
- Because even mild symptoms may reflect infection instead of side-effects of the vaccine before there is full immunity from the vaccine, the HCW must contact EHS for testing to rule out Covid-19 infection.
- The Pan-Bio result will be ready in 15 minutes.
- The HCW can continue at work with the expected mild symptoms.
- Note that if any symptoms are respiratory in nature such as sore throat or cough they should be tested and be off work until symptoms resolve.
- Individuals who develop side effects after the vaccine should contact EHS for further advice, but without other symptoms or high risk contact, would not generally be required to isolate.
- If you have a more severe or persistent reaction, contact EHS and arrangements can be made to complete and adverse effect following immunization form (AEFI) that will be completed by a health care provider and submitted to Hamilton Public Health.

More [post-vaccine information](#) for healthcare workers

Where can I find more about the vaccine, it's safety, side effects and information about how the province is proceeding?

**Here are some key links to important information:**

Information is made available by the [provincial government](#). It includes:

- [Vaccine information sheet](#)
- [What you need to know before your vaccine appointment](#)
- [After-care sheet](#)
- [Consent form](#)

- [Vaccine approval and safety](#)
- [General information about vaccines](#)
- Ontario's [vaccination implementation](#)
- Ontario's [ethical framework](#) for vaccinations