

Letter to our Community regarding COVID-19 Vaccines

In the last few weeks, we have seen significant advances in our understanding of the available COVID-19 vaccines. As of today, here is what we know. These vaccines work and are safe! The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, approved for use in Canada, work by sending a message to our body's immune system to stimulate our natural immune response. It does not contain any live or attenuated virus and cannot make you sick with COVID-19. Over 70,000 people were involved in the trials for the approved vaccines. The mRNA technology on which the vaccines are built started in the early 1990s, so this science is not actually new to us. As of January, more than 15 million people have been vaccinated worldwide. We know the vaccines protect us from getting symptomatic COVID-19 and getting very sick from COVID-19. The vaccines have a 94 to 95 per cent efficacy level (effectiveness) which helps prevent us from getting sick if exposed to the virus. These results are equal to the best vaccines we have for preventing any disease. People who were vaccinated for the COVID-19 virus were about 20 times less likely to get sick with COVID-19 than those who were not vaccinated. They likely will prevent us from spreading the virus or at least reducing the risk of spreading it to our loved ones and those around us. This level of efficacy (effectiveness) will play a major role in helping slow the spread of this virus and move us toward a post-pandemic Canada.

There will be people ahead of us in line, and people behind us. Ontario's goal is to vaccinate every eligible person by the end of 2021. In general, older adults and others at high risk of getting sick or of transmitting the virus will be vaccinated before others. It will take some time to vaccinate enough of our community members and achieve shared protection through herd immunity. During that time, it is crucial that we all continue to follow public health guidance regarding masking and distance, even after we are immunized – until experts say otherwise. The pandemic is evolving, which emphasizes the need to maintain these important measures.

There is also concerning news; cases and hospitalizations from COVID-19 continue at high levels throughout Ontario and there is the emergence of new strains of COVID-19 which are thought to be significantly more transmissible. The vaccines are a way out of Ontario's epidemic in the coming months, but they are not the only thing we must do. Despite the vaccine news, given the new strains and our case rates, our shared responsibility remains as important as it has ever been. Aside from getting vaccinated when our time comes, we must all still maintain our layers of protection. These layers mean physical distancing, masking, hand washing, and for now, staying at home other than for essential work, medical visits and shopping for groceries/medical supplies, and of course for safe and distancing forms of exercise.

In summary, the vaccines are safe and effective. We will continue to monitor the vaccine landscape and distribution and we will provide you with the most relevant science-based information as soon as we have it available to us.

We're proud of the way the community is coming through COVID. Thank you for all your efforts and keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

The Physicians of the Prince Edward Family Health Team