

# Planning for your COVID-19 vaccine

## Information for people with sickle cell disease

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November 23, 2022

### Why is planning for a COVID-19 vaccine important?

- Some people with sickle cell disease who are treated with red blood cell exchange need to time their vaccine in special ways.
- It is very important that you monitor how you are feeling in the days leading up to your vaccine appointment. If you do not feel well, rebook for when you are feeling better.
- You should also pay special attention to how you are feeling in the days after you receive your vaccine.

### Should I get the COVID-19 vaccine? Will the vaccine work for me?

- All of the COVID-19 vaccines available in Canada are safe. Vaccines teach your body to develop antibodies against the COVID-19 virus. These antibodies will help fight off future infections and protect from serious illness.
- Doctors and researchers have looked at the evidence. They agree that, unless you have a **very** serious allergy to any of the vaccine ingredients, you should strongly consider getting a COVID-19 vaccine. This is because you have a higher chance of experiencing severe symptoms if you get COVID-19.
- Many people with sickle cell disease have underlying heart and lung problems as well as problems with their spleen, which plays an important role in the immune system, so vaccines are very important.
- People with sickle cell disease weren't included in the clinical trials of the COVID-19 vaccines. However, the way the vaccines work means that there is a strong chance that your immune system will learn to protect you, to some degree, from COVID-19 better.

### What if I test positive for COVID-19?

- If you've recently had a positive COVID-19 test result, you can wait up to 3 months for a booster dose. The likelihood of a COVID-19 reinfection during this period of time is small because having COVID-19 boosts your immunity.
- You can also choose to get a booster dose at any time after your symptoms have passed. It is not harmful to get vaccinated and it will give you a good boost to your protection.

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## What about the medications or treatments that I take?

- If you are receiving treatment with red blood cell exchange, it is advised that you time your vaccine to occur **between one and 10 days after** getting the red blood cell exchange. This helps reduce the chance of developing something that people with sickle cell disease may experience called a sickle cell pain crisis.
- You can continue taking all of your other sickle cell disease medications (like hydroxyurea) as you usually do.
- If you don't see your medication listed, or if you take medications for another condition and you aren't sure if you need to worry about timing, you can also look at the [COVID-19 vaccine planning considerations](#) posted on the BCCDC website for that condition (if available), and/or call 8-1-1 or talk to your health-care provider.

## How else should I plan for my vaccine appointment?

- Review HealthLink BC's general information on [COVID-19 vaccines](#).
- It is important that you are feeling as well as possible when you get your vaccine.
- In the 2-3 days leading up to your vaccine, monitor yourself: are any of your symptoms new or worsening? If you aren't feeling well, rebook your vaccine appointment for another day. You won't lose your place in line. Consider reaching out to your health care provider about your worsening symptoms.
- You can feel safe going to the COVID-19 vaccine clinic, as they are following all COVID-19 safety precautions.

## What or who should I bring with me?

- Please bring your BC Services Card or CareCard to your appointment.
- You can bring any medical or mobility equipment that you need.
- If you need to, you can bring a trusted friend, family member or caregiver with you to support you through the process and/or translate for you as needed. Please only bring one person.

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## What happens after my vaccine?

- Everyone who gets the COVID-19 vaccine will stay on location to be monitored for 15 minutes after they receive the vaccine.
- People with sickle cell disease can develop a pain crisis after any vaccine, which is triggered by the tenderness and inflammation in the arm after receiving an injection.
- You should tell a health-care provider at the vaccination site if you do not feel well.
- If you have any new or worsening symptoms once you go home, please call your health care team or 8-1-1. If you have a severe allergic reaction, call 9-1-1 immediately.
- Contact your sickle cell disease care provider right away if you start to experience symptoms of a pain crisis.
- You can learn more about what to expect after your vaccine [on the BCCDC website](#).

## My vaccine planning checklist

- Read the COVID-19 vaccine information for my condition(s)
- Time my vaccine appointment around my medication and treatments (if relevant to me)
- Talk to my doctor if I have any questions or need any help planning my medication
- Monitor how I'm feeling leading up to my vaccination appointment. Is anything new or getting worse compared to how I usually feel?
- Plan to bring the medical and mobility equipment I need with me