COVID-19 is a very infectious disease that can cause life-threatening illness. COVID-19 disease can affect anyone. However, it is more dangerous for older adults and those with underlying medical conditions. Being healthy does not reduce the risk of catching or passing on the disease. Infected people can pass it on to family and friends, who may be at increased risk of complications, including death.

Vaccines are medicines that teach the body to recognize germs that cause diseases. If the body comes in contact with the germs in the future, it will be able to stop them. There are several vaccines that are approved for use against COVID-19 disease in Canada. They require 2 separate needle injections for full protection, spread out by 3 – 4 weeks.

The COVID-19 vaccines have similar side effects to other vaccines. The vaccines commonly cause pain and tenderness in the arm, feeling tired, headache, and general aches. You cannot catch COVID-19 from the vaccine.

Healthcare workers are being careful to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during vaccination. You will be asked to follow infection prevention safety measures also, including social distancing, wearing a facemask, and washing your hands frequently. You will also be asked to continue to follow the general advice of officials when you are at home or out and about. The vaccine takes time to work and it will take time to protect everyone in the community – public health infection prevention measures need to be followed.

THE CARD SYSTEM

The CARD system (Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract) can help you prepare for the COVID-19 vaccine and have a better vaccination experience. Each letter of the word CARD is a different category of activities you can do. This factsheet explains how to play your CARDS and includes information about what to expect and how to be ready. Talk to your health care provider if you have questions or if you have CARDS that require planning. Sign the permission form. You will be asked to agree again on the day of vaccination.
PLAY YOUR CARDS...

Think about how you would like to be more comfortable during your COVID-19 vaccination. For example, you can choose…

- To sit up or lie down
- To wear a short-sleeved or loose-fitting top that is easy to pull up.

Talk to someone you trust, such as a family member or health care provider. You can ask questions about the vaccine or about what CARDS you can play. For example, you can ask…

- If I have had the flu vaccine, do I still need the COVID-19 vaccine? Yes. The flu vaccine does not protect you from COVID-19.
- Can someone keep me company during the procedure? Yes. Speak to your healthcare provider about arranging this.
- Can I use numbing creams? These are medicines applied to the skin ahead of time that dull the pain where the needle enters the skin. They are available without a prescription. They take 20-60 minutes to work, depending on the product, so plan ahead.
- Is there anything that can help minimize the sore arm or feelings of tiredness or general aches that can happen after vaccination? Yes. Take acetaminophen at the time of vaccination.
- What will happen if I get a fever? Take acetaminophen for fever or pain relief.

Think of ways that you normally keep yourself calm and relaxed. This helps to make vaccination a more positive experience because it lessens feelings of pain and fear. For example, you can choose…

- To listen to music that you find soothing
- To take slow deep breaths. This is like blowing up a balloon or blowing out candles. The belly should move out when breathing in and move in when breathing out.

Think of your preferences for what you want to do during the procedure. Do you like to be distracted or do you like to look at the needle? If you like to be distracted, you can choose…

- To use an object to get your mind off the needle (for example, use your cell phone)
- Talk to the nurse about something else.

TIPS FOR VACCINATION DAY...

- Use the CARD system to make needles more comfortable: Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract.
- Try to eat something before vaccination and afterwards.
- You will receive the vaccine in the upper arm. Wear short sleeves or something easy to pull up so that the upper arm can be reached easily.
- Bring any supplies you need, such as a facemask and something to distract you.
- Be calm and positive.
- Do not tense your arm where the needle is going in – keep it loose or jiggly like cooked spaghetti.
- If you feel faint or get dizzy during needles, you can squeeze your knees together or lie down.
- Have acetaminophen available to treat common side effects. Let your health care provider know if you are experiencing any side effects that worry you.
- Keep a record of the vaccine you received and make an appointment for your second dose. Do not attend your next appointment if you are sick, self-isolating, or waiting for a COVID-19 test result. Try to get your second dose after you feel better and as soon as you are able to do so.