



Dear Patients,

The year 2020 brought much fear and change to the way we live our lives. As we begin 2021, there is hope. **Vaccines are on their way!**

As you all know, the first vaccines are being given to higher-risk people and healthcare workers. We are excited to tell you that many on our team have had their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. We look forward to when you all will have access to the vaccine.

Although we do not yet know timing, **we will communicate how and when you can get your vaccine as soon as we know.**

Patients have asked some questions that we wanted to answer at this stage – please see below, and you can find more detail [here](#).

- **Were appropriate steps taken to develop the vaccines or was the process rushed?**

The vaccines were produced faster than before not because of skipped steps but because of never-before-seen levels of collaboration and funding around the world invested in this effort.

Normally, vaccine clinical trials need 6000-8000 people for the approval process. The Pfizer-BioNTech trial had over 45,000 people and the Moderna trial over 30,000. The bureaucratic process was expedited because of the importance of getting a vaccine to the world.

- **The vaccine is based on new technology so do we know it is safe?** We know it is safe because mRNA has been studied and used for cancer treatments for about 30 years. While this is the first time the technology is being used for a vaccine, the technology has a long history.

There are currently two mRNA vaccines made this way (Pfizer and Moderna). mRNA vaccines cannot give someone COVID-19 as they do not use the live virus that causes COVID-19. They also do not affect or interact with our DNA in any way.

This [YouTube video](#) explains how mRNA vaccines work and the effectiveness of the Pfizer vaccine. The video was created by one of our previous family medicine residents, Dr. Hailey McInnis.

There will be other vaccines coming out later which are made with different technology. You can find more information [here](#).

- **Is the vaccine effective?** In clinical studies, very few people got COVID-19 within 12 days of getting the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine. This result is similar to the Moderna vaccine, which is the other COVID-19 vaccine now approved for use in Canada. A summary of the effectiveness of the Pfizer vaccine and common side effects can be found [here](#).

Have a look at how the curve for COVID infection was flattened for the group that had the vaccine.

- **Is the vaccine safe to take if pregnant or breastfeeding?** Pregnant and breastfeeding women were not included in trials for the currently available vaccines. However, based on what we know about other vaccines and about the components of this vaccine, there is no reason to believe that the vaccine would be less effective or less safe in pregnant and breastfeeding women.

mRNA vaccines are not live vaccines and are not expected to be a risk to the breastfeeding infant. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada has stated that “the documented risk of not getting the COVID-19 vaccine outweighs the theorized and undescribed risk of being vaccinated during pregnancy or while breastfeeding and vaccination should be offered.”

The Ontario Ministry of Health guidance states that pregnant women should discuss risks and benefits with their family physician or primary healthcare provider. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, we will discuss the risks and benefits to help you make an informed decision about receiving the vaccine. See the full SOGC statement [here](#).

- **Can the COVID vaccines be given to children?** The vaccines have not been tested in children under the age of 16. Currently, health authorities do not recommend that the vaccine be administered to children, as children often need a different dose than adults and may show stronger immune reactions.
- **Can people with a history of allergies get the vaccine?** People who have had a severe allergic reaction (i.e., anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of an mRNA vaccine or any of the ingredients in the vaccine should not receive it. We will discuss any allergies or other health conditions you may have before you receive the vaccine. If needed, we can seek input from an allergist-immunologist.
- **If I have an autoimmune condition or if I am immunocompromised, can I get the vaccine?** If you have an autoimmune or immunodeficiency condition, or are immunosuppressed due to disease or treatment, we will discuss the benefits and risks of vaccination given your particular situation and come to a decision together. People with these conditions were not included in the trials for the currently available vaccines, although vaccination may be a good idea for you to reduce your risk of getting a COVID-19 infection.

**We're here for you!**

Our office remains accessible to you, by phone, by video or in person as necessary. If you have questions about your own personal health situation when the vaccine becomes available to you, we encourage you book a phone or video appointment to discuss these issues with your health care provider. Thank you all for what you have done to keep yourselves, your loved ones, and your communities safe. And thank you to those frontline workers who have faced fears and yet continued to provide the services that we have needed to function.

We look forward to the wider vaccination rollout – and a return to a life that is more connected. The next month is going to be very challenging for our health care system and we all need to work together. Everyone can help. **Please wear a mask, keep your distance, wash your hands AND get vaccinated if you are able to when the time comes.**

Warmly,

The Mount Sinai Family Health Team.

PS Scroll down to see some of our smiling eyes as we at Sinai Health received our first COVID-19 vaccines.









