

COVID-19 VACCINES



Updated: May 2024

Vaccines: What YOUTH Want to Know

The COVID-19 pandemic may no longer be a public health emergency, but it's taught us that getting vaccinated is an important way to protect ourselves and the people we care about into the future.

This resource, made by youth for youth, shares experiences and insights from young people with mental health concerns who were part of a youth-led study that looked at attitudes and beliefs regarding COVID-19 vaccines.



What Youth Say about Vaccines

We had conversations with diverse youth, and here's what they said about getting – or not getting – vaccinated.

TOP REASONS YOUTH GET VACCINATED

- Protect their own health and safety
- Keep family, friends and community safe
- Want life to go back to normal and stay normal
- Required by school or work

TOP REASONS YOUTH HESITATE TO GET VACCINATED

- Concerns about the safety of vaccines
- Needle phobia
- Don't like being told what to do
- Don't know who to trust
- Confused by conflicting claims and information

"I live in a multi-generational household, so I knew that the risks were really high."

"My fear of needles comes from a personal experience.... It led to a fear of needles, which makes it hard to even get blood work done. I had my sister kind of helping me through [getting the vaccine]. So I was like, okay, this isn't the worst thing."



RACIALIZED YOUTH AND VACCINE CONCERNS

Some groups in Canada are more likely to have concerns about vaccination. They include Black people, Indigenous people and newcomers. Past and ongoing mistreatment by the government and health care systems means that many Indigenous people and Black Canadians don't trust these institutions. A history of racial segregation in medical facilities and medical experimentation on these groups has deepened medical mistrust.

"[Some communities] have a history of vaccines where they were forced to take it... they were the subject of research. Lack of trust is historical, embedded and intergenerational, so when I think about being told to do something, it's like, when we did it the last time our community suffered. That history isn't being accounted for. It's like everybody should take it, accept it and just do it"

Opening Up Conversations about Vaccines

Here's what youth said health care providers can do to create safe spaces for talking about vaccines:

- Share personal vaccination experiences openly.
- Create safe, judgment-free spaces for discussions.
- Listen to the concerns that youth express and respond with empathy.
- Use plain language to explain vaccines.
- Respect each person's cultural beliefs, experiences and attitudes.



Mental Health and COVID-19

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED MENTAL HEALTH?

The number of youth reporting mental health concerns has dramatically increased since before the pandemic – more than for any other age group.

- Suicide, suicidal thoughts and self-harm have increased among youth.
- Compared with adults, youth report much higher rates of depression (32% vs. 25%) and anxiety (40% vs. 23%).
- Depression is 1.6 times more common among 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and 1.8 times more common among non-binary youth compared with heterosexual and cisgender youth.
- Long wait times, shorter or postponed appointments and fewer in-person services during and after the pandemic have made it harder for youth to get mental health support.

“Being trapped at home and social distancing in isolating wasn’t too good for my mental health, so it influenced me to get the vaccine.”

ARE YOUTH WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS AT HIGHER RISK?

- Youth had higher rates of COVID-19 infection compared with other age groups during the pandemic.
- People with a mental health diagnosis had a 65% increased risk of getting COVID-19 compared with people who didn’t have a diagnosis.
- The risk for severe illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19 was higher among people with mental health concerns, particularly young people.

HOW DOES COVID-19 INFECTION AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH?

People with COVID-19 may experience symptoms related to brain function and mental health, including:

- cognitive and attention challenges (brain fog)
- anxiety and depression
- psychosis
- seizures
- thoughts of suicide.

People are more likely to develop mental health concerns, including symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, in the months following infection. People with long COVID (symptoms that last for more than 12 weeks after the infection) may experience many symptoms related to brain function and mental health.



Finding Information You Can Trust

Understanding what information about COVID-19 vaccines you can trust can be tough because there's a lot of false information going around. Look for information from reliable sources like doctors, scientists and official health organizations because they base their advice on evidence and research.

Always double-check before believing something you see online or hear from someone who isn't an expert. The "For More about Vaccines" section lists sources youth told us they trust.

Fast Stats

Youth have some of the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rates out of all age groups. Here are statistics from the [federal government's infobase](#):

How many doses did youth get?

At least one dose:

- Age 12–17 (78%)
- Age 18–29 (79%)

All recommended doses:

- Age 12–17 (9%)
- Age 18–29 (7%)

"There are a few conspiracy theories.... I see people posting things that are so scary and so dangerous to spread. [We need a place] where all these conspiracies or myths are being busted so I know how to respond to those situations."



COVID-19 Vaccine Myth Busters

Myth



Getting the vaccine can cause you to contract the virus.

Reality



The vaccine does not give you the virus or cause an infection because mRNA vaccines do not contain live viruses. Instead, our cells make copies of the virus protein and then they destroy the mRNA from the vaccine.

Myth



Vaccine side effects last for many weeks.

Reality



The side effects usually occur within one or two days of being vaccinated and ease up within one to three days.

Myth



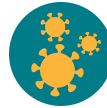
The vaccine can give you false positive results on an infection test.

Reality



The vaccines do not interfere with COVID-19 tests and do not cause false positive results.

Myth



Getting the vaccine will give me worse side effects than actually contracting the virus.

Reality



Vaccination is the most important preventative measure to reduce your risk of severe illness and hospitalization from COVID-19.

Myth



The vaccine will harm your immune system.

Reality



mRNA vaccines are designed to produce an immune response that protects you against the virus that causes the COVID-19 infection.

Myth



The vaccine contains a microchip/tracker from the government.

Reality



Vaccines are not administered to track you or get other information about your life. They do not contain manufactured products such as microelectronics, electrodes, carbon nanotubes or nanowire semiconductors.

COVID-19 VACCINE MYTH BUSTERS (CONTINUED)

Myth



Vaccines are untested and unsafe.

Reality



mRNA vaccines were authorized by Health Canada after strict clinical tests found that they are safe and effective (91–95%).

Myth



One vaccine brand is better than all of the other brands (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech is better than Moderna).

Reality



There is no recommendation for using one COVID-19 vaccine over another. Currently three vaccines are recommended in Canada: the mRNA vaccines Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech are recommended for people age six months and older. The subunit vaccine Novavax is recommended for people age 12 and older.

Myth



Vaccines such as the COVID-19 vaccine will affect my fertility.

Reality



Currently no evidence shows that any vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, cause fertility problems (difficulty getting pregnant) in women or men.

Myth



Vaccines can result in new-onset of autism.

Reality



There is no connection between vaccination and developing autism. One study published in *The Lancet* in 1998 suggested a link between autism and the MMR vaccine (a vaccine against measles, mumps and rubella), but the study was seriously flawed and the journal retracted the article. Current evidence shows that vaccines are safe and do not increase the risk of developing neurodevelopmental conditions.



Key Terms to Know

There are terms that youth told us they heard and wanted more information about. Here are some definitions youth asked for:

- **DISINFORMATION:** Deliberately misleading or biased information; manipulated narrative or facts.
- **MISINFORMATION:** False information that is spread, regardless of intent to mislead.
- **HERD IMMUNITY:** The more people who have been vaccinated against a disease, the less chance there is of the disease spreading in a community. That's why it's also called community immunity.
- **mRNA VACCINES:** Vaccines that don't use a live virus to trigger an immune response. They use a molecule called mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid), which directs cells to make a protein that is found on the surface of the virus. Your immune system recognizes that this protein doesn't belong and builds antibodies that fight the infection if you contract the actual virus. The Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty and the Moderna Spikevax are mRNA vaccines.
- **SUBUNIT VACCINES:** Vaccines that use part of a virus to trigger an immune response. They contain harmless pieces (proteins) of the virus that stimulate your immune system. When you get vaccinated, your immune system recognizes that these proteins don't belong and creates antibodies and defensive white blood cells. If you then contract the virus, the antibodies will fight it. The Novavax COVID-19 vaccine is a protein subunit vaccine.
- **VACCINE HESITANCY:** A delay in accepting vaccination, or a decision to refuse vaccination, despite the availability and safety of vaccines.
- **VIRUS:** An infectious microscopic organism that consists of small pieces of genetic information (DNA or RNA) inside a protective protein shell called a capsid.



For More about Vaccines

Check out this COVID-19 vaccine information that youth told us they trust. We've added links to general vaccine information too:

[Youth COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy study \(BMJ Open\)](#)

COVID-19 VACCINES

- [CAMH: Youth and vaccine hesitancy](#)
- [CAMH: COVID-19 information](#)
- [CAMH: COVID-19 vaccine information](#)
- [CAMH: Youth resources for coping during COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine recommendations in Ontario](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine recommendations from your own provincial, territorial or local health unit](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(U.S.\)](#)
- [Hospital for Sick Children](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [Public Health Ontario](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

VACCINE BASICS FOR YOUTH

- [A Teen's Guide to Vaccination \(Public Health Agency of Canada\)](#)
- [Vaccine Q&A \(Immunize Canada\)](#)
- [City of Toronto vaccination sites](#)

Sources

Here's where we got the scientific information in this resource:

- [Canadian Mental Health Association, Mental Health at the Pandemic's End](#)
- [Government of Canada, COVID-19 Epidemiology Update](#)
- [Lancet Psychiatry, Bidirectional associations between COVID-19 and psychiatric disorder](#)
- [Mayo Clinic, Different Types of COVID-19 Vaccines: How They Work](#)
- [National Institutes of Health \(U.S.\), Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Statistics Canada, Survey on COVID-19 and Mental Health, February to May 2023](#)
- [World Health Organization, Mental Health and COVID-19: Early Evidence of the Pandemic's Impact](#)

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