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COVID VACCINE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

2020 has been a difficult year for everyone and there have been many changes to the way we live our lives. Now that we are in 2021, we have light at the end of the tunnel with vaccines for COVID-19 being distributed across Canada and soon to be available.

This document was made to give information and answer frequently asked questions about the vaccine and its distribution.

HOW DOES THE COVID-19 VACCINE WORK?

The vaccine is similar to an instruction set, like one from IKEA. It shows your body a picture of the furniture. Specifically it shows the spike protein, which are the spikey parts sticking out of the virus. After getting the vaccine, your body starts to make only the spike protein (not the whole virus). Your body can then practise getting rid of the spike protein (like how you learn about how to make the furniture by reading the instructions ahead of time). This means if your body runs into the actual COVID-19 virus, it already knows what to watch out for and can get rid of it faster. Another way to think of it is like a wanted poster. Your body's immune system learns what the criminal (COVID-19) looks like from the photo and runs training drills on how to get rid of it. That way if it encounters the real thing, it is trained on exactly what to do to run it out of town!

CAN THE VACCINE GIVE ME COVID-19?

No. The vaccine does not contain any virus, alive or dead. There is no way for your body to get COVID-19 from the vaccine because all your body is seeing is a 'picture' of the virus (specifically the spike protein). It is like how you cannot assemble IKEA furniture with just the instructions – you need the pieces too! – and the vaccine does not have the pieces.

WHAT ABOUT THE NEW VARIANTS OF COVID – WILL THE VACCINE STILL WORK?

Yes. Your body's immune system is very smart. Your body can still recognize the virus even if there are small changes. This is like if the IKEA furniture set was missing a screw, or if the criminal was wearing a hat. In these situations, your body knows one screw is not a big difference to the end product of furniture, and you can still recognize someone even if they are wearing a hat!

ONCE I GET THE VACCINE, HOW LONG UNTIL I AM IMMUNE?

About two weeks after the first dose of the vaccine, there will be a moderate level of immunity. However, the highest level of immunity starts about one week after the second dose of the vaccine.

WILL THIS CHANGE MY DNA OR AFFECT MY DNA?

No. The COVID-19 vaccine uses mRNA. Humans do not have the ability to convert mRNA to DNA. We can only turn mRNA into protein, specifically the spike protein, which your body uses like the instruction set or wanted poster that your body uses as practice to get rid of.

IS THE VACCINE SAFE IF I AM PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING?

Generally, yes. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) issued a statement in support of pregnant and breastfeeding mothers receiving the vaccine. In summary, getting the vaccine is safer than getting COVID-19 while pregnant. There is no reason that the COVID-19 vaccine would be dangerous to a pregnant mother, her baby, or a breastfeeding infant. There is actually the possibility that if a mother received the vaccine, that the baby might be protected as well! This is why many pregnant and breastfeeding mothers have already been vaccinated. Pregnant women should discuss this with their healthcare provider.

IS THE VACCINE SAFE FOR CHILDREN?

Children were not a part of the vaccine studies, which is normal. Children are at lower risk for severe COVID-19. Since the vaccine reduces the risk of severe COVID-19, children are likely not going to be immunized until most adults have been first. When they are immunized, there is no reason to suggest that the vaccine would not be effective.

IS THE VACCINE SAFE IF I AM IMMUNOCOMPROMISED? WHAT ABOUT AN AUTOIMMUNE CONDITION?

If you have an immunodeficiency condition, are immunocompromised due to a disease or treatment, or have an autoimmune condition, you should contact your healthcare provider to have a chat about your particular situation and come to a decision together. People who were immunocompromised or had an autoimmune condition were not part of the vaccine studies but many would benefit from being vaccinated against COVID-19.

WHAT IS IN THE VACCINE? IS THERE ANYTHING TOXIC OR HARMFUL?

The mRNA (instruction set / wanted poster) is in the vaccine. This is wrapped in a small bubble of fat, or cholesterol (like a cardboard box) to keep it safe. There is some sugar and some electrolytes to keep the

bubble of fat safe (like wrapping paper around the box). There is nothing toxic or harmful in the vaccine, and there are also no preservatives!

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Not everyone gets side effects. For those who do get side effects, almost all of them should be gone after 48 hours. The most common side effects are mild to moderate pain at the injection site, low-grade fatigue, a low-grade fever, muscle aches and/or a headache. Severe anaphylactic reactions to the vaccine are extremely rare (0.001%, or 11 out of 1 million). For any person who has been immunized (millions so far), healthcare providers and scientists are watching for any other side effects too; that way we make sure we keep everyone safe.

WHAT IF I AM ALLERGIC TO EGGS AND CANNOT GET OTHER VACCINES? CAN I STILL GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Yes. There is no egg protein in the COVID-19 vaccine, or in the flu vaccine for that matter, so people with egg allergies can get either. It is possible to be allergic to something else, but a major allergic reaction is extremely rare. If you are worried, please contact your healthcare provider to have a chat to make sure we can help keep you safe and answer any questions!

ONCE I GET VACCINATED, CAN I STOP WEARING A MASK?

Unfortunately no. The vaccine reduces the risk of severe COVID-19 by about 95%. However, even if we are vaccinated, we might still be able to transmit the virus to other people who are not vaccinated. In order to keep other people safe, we need to keep wearing masks, washing our hands, and maintaining physical distancing.

HOW LONG WILL COVID LAST?

It is hard to say but infectious disease experts expect COVID-19 to be around for a long time. The good news is that the virus will probably get less deadly over time.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN VACCINATED? I DON'T WANT TO BE A "GUINEA PIG".

As of mid-January 2021, approximately 613,000 Canadians and 11 million Americans have received

their first dose of the vaccine. Worldwide, more than 32 million people have already been vaccinated. With so many people already vaccinated, this shows that if there were any serious side effects, we would know about them by now!

THIS FEELS FAST. DID SCIENTISTS OR THE GOVERNMENT SKIP STEPS?

No. The vaccine went through the same steps as any other vaccine. It was developed quickly because of never-before-seen levels of funding and collaboration around the world, with everyone working together to make a vaccine faster because COVID-19 is so deadly. Instead of slowing things down, the government asked the companies that make vaccines to plan all the steps from the start to make the process more efficient ("cutting the red tape").

WHEN WILL I BE ABLE TO GET THE VACCINE?

Each province has developed its own plan to distribute the vaccine. The plan is to vaccinate the most at-risk people first to help keep them safe. Each phase overlaps with the next as we get more vaccine doses. Phase 1 includes residents and workers in long-term care homes, healthcare workers, and certain Indigenous communities. Phase 2 includes elderly patients, people who work in other high-risk settings, frontline essential workers, and patients with high-risk chronic conditions. Phase 3 includes everyone else who wishes to be vaccinated.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN IT IS MY TURN?

Currently BC is still in Phase 1 of administering the vaccine. As the rollout continues, expect more information about vaccine availability from Public Health.

I HAVE READ ABOUT THE PFIZER VACCINE AND THE MODERNA VACCINE? WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE AND WHICH ONE IS BETTER?

Both the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccine work the same way using the same parts. They are both equally as effective. It is like Coke vs. Pepsi where there are only tiny differences. One difference is they require a different storage temperature, but, again, they are equally as safe and as effective.