

Letter from CFFM Physicians Regarding COVID-19 Vaccines

January 15, 2021

Dear Patients,

2020 brought much fear and many changes to the way we live our lives. As we begin 2021, there is hope – **COVID-19 vaccines are on their way.**

As you all know, the first vaccines are being given to higher-risk people and healthcare workers. But we look forward to when all of you will have access to the vaccine. Currently, COVID-19 vaccines are being distributed by hospitals and Public Health to priority populations and **we do not know if/when our office will be involved in administering a COVID-19 vaccine.** Please do not call our office to ask if we have the vaccine or if we can put you on a list. We will update you as soon as we know more about our role in giving the vaccine. In the meantime, please follow updates from [Region of Waterloo Public Health COVID-19 Vaccine website](#).

Some questions have arisen that we wanted to answer at this stage – please see below:

- **Appropriate steps taken** – The vaccines were developed so fast because it was a top priority for everyone in the field and billions of dollars from governments and companies around the world were spent on getting it developed. The scientific world cooperated in ways they had not before, and all three phases of vaccine testing were completed quickly because of this. The regulatory process was super-fast because of the importance of getting this through, but **Health Canada reviewed all of the vaccine trial data carefully before approving each COVID-19 vaccine.**
- **New technology** – mRNA has been studied and used for cancer treatments for upwards of 30 years, but this is the first vaccine using the technology. There are two 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. There will be other vaccines coming later which are made with older technology. More information is available [here](#).
- **Effectiveness** – In clinical studies, the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines protected people from COVID-19, **showing 94-95% effectiveness** after two doses of the vaccines, for the duration of the trials. Both of these vaccines are now approved for use in Canada.
- **Pregnancy/breastfeeding** – Pregnant and breastfeeding women were not included in trials for the currently available vaccines. However, 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. The Ministry also points out that mRNA vaccines are not live vaccines and are not expected to be a risk to the breastfeeding infant. **If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, we will discuss the risks and benefits** to help you make an informed decision about receiving the vaccine.

- **Allergies** – People who have ever 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. **People with allergies to foods, environmental triggers (pollen, etc.), or non-injection medications, even those with history of anaphylaxis, are recommended to be offered the vaccine** but may need to be observed for 30 minutes after vaccine administration, depending on the severity of their allergies. 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. Detailed recommendations from the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology can be found [here](#).
- **Autoimmune conditions/Immunocompromised** – If you have an autoimmune condition or are immunocompromised 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. Some details from the Canadian Rheumatology Association can be found [here](#).
- **Children and Teens** – Children were not included in the initial COVID-19 vaccine trials (under age 16 for Pfizer and under age 18 for Moderna). Therefore, **at this time it is not recommended that either vaccine be administered to children**, as there is no evidence in this population and children often need a different dose than adults. More data are expected in 2021.

At CFFM our office has remained accessible to you by phone, by video, or in person if deemed necessary. We thank you for your understanding as we continue to provide care for you in these different ways.

We, our staff, and other front-line workers have faced the same fears you have, but our goal has and will continue to be to provide care to you. We look forward to being involved in the implementation of the vaccine roll-out to keep you all safe and healthy and to allow all of us to return to a life that is once again more connected. In the meantime:

Wear a mask, keep your distance, wash your hands. AND be calm, be safe, be kind.

Warmly,

Your Family Physicians from The Centre for Family Medicine FHT

COVID-19 Vaccine Links:

Ontario COVID-19 Vaccine Information:

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-ontario>

Region of Waterloo Public Health COVID-19 Vaccine Information:

<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/health-and-wellness/covid-19-vaccine.aspx>

Society of Obstetrician and Gynecologists of Canada Statement on COVID-19 Vaccine:

https://www.sogc.org/en/content/featured-news/SOGC_Statement_on_COVID-19_Vaccination_in_Pregnancy.aspx

Canadian Rheumatology Association Position Statement on COVID-19 Vaccination:

<https://rheum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CRA-Position-Statement-on-COVID-19-Vaccination-v2-FINAL.pdf>

Canadian Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology:

<https://csaci.ca/covid19-resources/>