

Ministry of Health

COVID-19 Guidance for Health Care Settings: Managing Health Care Workers with Symptoms within 48 Hours of Receiving COVID-19 Vaccine

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This guidance provides basic information only. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, legal advice or legal requirements.

In the event of any conflict between this guidance document and any applicable emergency orders, or directives issued by the Minister of Health, Minister of Long-Term Care, or the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), the order or directive prevails.

- Please check the Ministry of Health (MOH) [COVID-19 website](#) regularly for updates to this document, list of symptoms, other guidance documents, Directives and other information.

Purpose

- The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to health care settings, including long-term care homes, on planning for and support of health care workers (HCW) who have recently received COVID-19 vaccination. Individuals who have had the vaccine may develop symptoms that could be post-vaccine side effects or could be symptoms of COVID-19. This document includes actions to take prior to vaccination for HCWs, and the assessment of HCWs with post-vaccine symptoms.

Preparations Before Vaccination Delivery

- Ensure HCWs being vaccinated are aware of the common side effects from the vaccine.

- Most [symptoms that are compatible with COVID-19](#) require the HCW to stay at home and seek medical attention. However, there are a select number of mild non-respiratory symptoms compatible with COVID-19 that if they occur in the 48 hours after vaccination, HCWs can continue to work.
- The home should review staffing schedules and assignments to ensure adequate staffing in case of staff being off due side effects following vaccination. Where operationally feasible, consider scheduling immunization at a time when there are 48 hours until their next shift.
- HCWs do not need to be tested prior to vaccination to rule out infection.

For long-term care home staff

- Where it is operationally feasible, consider scheduling their routine (weekly or bi-weekly) COVID-19 surveillance testing so that it occurs within two days prior to vaccine receipt. If mild non-respiratory symptoms occur within 48 hours after vaccination, recent negative test results will be helpful for reassuring that the mild symptoms are due to vaccination and less likely to be related to COVID-19 infection.

Symptom Screening of HCWs in the 48 Hours after Vaccination

- Similar to other medications and vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccine can cause side effects although not everyone will experience these symptoms. Most side effects are minor and don't last very long.
- The most common symptoms reported in >10% of vaccine recipients include: pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, and fever.
- HCWs should be screened as usual prior to arriving to their health care setting/place of work.
- It is advised that homes should assign an individual to assess post-vaccine staff and complete the Adverse Event Following Immunization (AEFI) reporting. The assigned individual would likely be better positioned to identify actual COVID-19 risk than the screener at the door to the facility.

- In the **48 hours after vaccination**, if the HCW screens positive for the following symptoms, **and where the symptoms are mild** (the HCW feels well enough to work) **and they only began after vaccination**, the HCW can continue to work:
 - Headache
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle ache
 - Joint pain
- These symptoms should be noted and reported to their manager and/or Occupational Health department.
- If COVID-19 is suspected, HCWs with one or more of these mild symptoms should be excluded from work and seek further medical evaluation.
- Pain at the site of injection is not a symptom compatible with COVID-19.
- If a HCW experiences more than mild symptoms (e.g., symptoms interfering with ability to carry out usual activities), or their COVID-19 compatible symptoms last >48 hours from when they were vaccinated, **they should not come to work/leave work immediately, and seek further medical evaluation**. If a HCW is unsure, based on their symptoms, whether they should be at work, they should consult their manager and/or Occupational Health department.
- If a HCW has any other symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., respiratory symptoms or loss of sense of smell or taste), at any time after vaccination, they should not come to work, and seek further medical evaluation.
- Unless confirmed to be COVID 19 disease-related symptoms, any potential adverse events following COVID-19 vaccine should be reported to the local [public health unit](#) using the [ON Adverse Event Following Immunization \(AEFI\) reporting form](#) (see form for list of events).