COVID-19 Vaccines: Expected Side Effects vs. Adverse Events

Common & expected side effects from COVID-19 vaccines:

Most side effects caused by Moderna and Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines are minor and short lived. These side effects are normal and are expected. They may be more likely to occur after the second dose.

These may include:

- redness and swelling at the injection site
- tiredness
- headache
- muscle pain
- joint pain
- chills
- mild fever
- swollen glands (less frequently)

Tips that may help to ease common side effects:

Some people find that putting a cold compress on the injection site or taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be helpful with side effects.

What are adverse reactions and how do you report them?

Severe reactions are uncommon. If you need medical assistance, please seek medical attention. Call 911 if you need assistance immediately.

Signs of serious allergic reactions may include:

- difficulty breathing
- swelling of face, throat or tongue
- hives (bumps on the skin that are itchy)

If these occur, a doctor should report them to Hamilton Public Health.

Other uncommon adverse reactions that need a doctor to report them to Hamilton Public Health include:

- rash
- swelling of arm that spreads to the next joint (elbow) or lasts 4 days or more
- pain that lasts 4 days or more
- fainting that causes injury
- swelling of the face or mouth
- very pale colour and serious drowsiness
- high fever (over 40°C)
- convulsions or seizures
- other serious symptoms (e.g., “pins and needles” or numbness lasting for over 24 hours).

IMPORTANT: Discuss uncommon reactions with your family doctor. If you don’t have a family doctor, a walk-in clinic might be preferred. A doctor can diagnose these uncommon reactions and report them to the local health unit. If you do not have access to a doctor, please call the Vaccine Program at Public health at 905-546-2424 ext 7556 to report symptoms. If you need a family doctor, please consider https://needadoc.ca.