**COVID-19 VACCINATION FAQ**

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**How The Vaccines Work: Science and Safety**

1. **How do the vaccines work?**

The vaccines are administered in two doses -- an initial dose and a booster shot.

The COVID-19 vaccine is an mRNA (“messenger RNA”) vaccine. Unlike some other vaccines that put a weakened version of a virus into the body, the mRNA vaccine for COVID-19 carries instructions to our immune system on how to destroy the virus.

Specifically, it shows our cells how to make a piece of the protein that’s found on the surface of the COVID-19 virus. Once our cells realize that protein doesn’t belong, it will fight it and create antibodies.

([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mRNA.html))

1. **Will this prevent me from ever getting COVID-19?**

The vaccines are 95% effective after two doses. For those who do get infected with COVID-19, the vaccine may keep you from becoming seriously ill with it. ([Mayo Clinic](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/coronavirus-vaccine/art-20484859))

1. **Does this vaccine protect me from variants, like the more contagious UK and South African variants?**

These variants are new, and we are still learning about them. However, the Pfizer vaccine appeared to work against the South African variant in a [preliminary study](https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.01.07.425740v1.full.pdf), and was effective against the UK variant in [a study conducted by the manufacturer.](https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-pfizer-vaccine/pfizer-biontech-vaccine-appears-effective-against-mutation-in-new-coronavirus-variants-study-idUSL1N2JI2LZ) These studies are awaiting peer review.

1. **Is there an alternative to a shot, like an aerosol, similar to the flu shot?**

Currently, the only way to receive the COVID-19 vaccine is via injection in the upper arm.

1. **Will it give me Coronavirus/will I test positive for COVID-19?**

The vaccine does not infect you with COVID-19, and you can’t fall sick with COVID-19 as a result of getting the vaccine. You will not test positive for COVID-19 because you have received the vaccine. ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits/facts.html))

1. **What if I get the vaccine but the people I live with choose not to?**

While getting vaccinated offers great protection from the virus, the CDC advises that you still maintain social distancing, vigilant hand-washing, mask-wearing, and stay home if you’re feeling sick. ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html))

Keep it in mind that it typically takes a few weeks for the vaccine’s full effects to kick in. ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/how-they-work.html))

1. **I have an underlying medical condition. Is the vaccine safe for me?**

No data is currently available for individuals with autoimmune conditions or weakened immune systems. The CDC [may update this information](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/underlying-conditions.html) over time.

Please remember that those with certain underlying medical conditions have a higher risk of becoming severely ill -- or dying -- if they are infected with COVID-19.

Everybody is unique, so please consult **[our office]** so we can review your health status, history and vaccine eligibility.

1. **I tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies. Isn’t my natural immunity stronger than the vaccine?**

We don’t know enough yet to say which source of immunity is stronger, but we do know one important difference: People who have recovered from COVID-19 have [shown a difference in antibody levels over the same time period](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6947a2.htm). It depends on how strong your immune system’s response was to infection, and that can look different from person to person.

Immunity from the vaccine, however, created a consistent level of antibodies over the same time period. ([New England Journal of Medicine](https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2032195))

The CDC recommends that everyone gets vaccinated. If you’ve been infected with COVID recently, you can delay the vaccine up to 90 days from initial infection. ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html))

1. **For how long does the vaccine protect me from COVID-19?**

It’s too early to know if the vaccine provides long-term protection. Additional research is needed to answer this question. ([WHO](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-vaccines?adgroupsurvey=%7Badgroupsurvey%7D&gclid=Cj0KCQiA0MD_BRCTARIsADXoopb105HE3GcabdcNty1BxtCQHNdsleKf8nat-0ZodJJhBQ6q9_q0jRAaAqIpEALw_wcB))

1. **Which of the vaccines is better: Pfizer or Moderna?**

Both vaccines are equally effective, leading to 95% immunity to the virus.

Both vaccines require two doses. The two doses of the Pfizer vaccine are taken 21 days apart, while Moderna requires 28 days between doses. ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html))

It is important to note that you may not get one dose of the Pfizer vaccine and one does of the Moderna vaccine. Patients must receive two of the Pfizer vaccine or two of the Moderna vaccine -- they are not interchangeable. ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html))

1. **I am in the middle of a medical event (chemotherapy, recovery from a heart attack, recent surgery, etc.). Should I wait to get the vaccine?**

Consult with your healthcare providers on whether or not you are ready to receive the COVID-19 vaccines.

Cancer patients [did not participate in trials and testing](https://www.lls.org/covid-19-vaccines-faq) for the COVID-19 vaccine.

**Getting Immunized: Who, When, Where, How, and Why**

1. **How much will it cost me to get the vaccine?**

For now, the vaccine comes at no cost to patients, and providers are being reimbursed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. ([CMS](https://www.cms.gov/covidvax-provider))

**[Custom Message]**

We may charge a visit fee for the operational costs involved with carrying, scheduling, and administering the vaccine, as well as post-vaccine health monitoring. Please consult our office for specifics, and check with your insurer about associated costs.

1. **When is it my turn to get the vaccine?**

Timeframes and eligibility vary by state, and may change over time. You can contact your state’s Department of Health for more information.

**[Custom Message]**

1. **Can I get my vaccine at [your office]? If not, where can I get it?**

**[Custom Message]**

We are not currently administering the vaccine but will notify our patients when we do. Please join our COVID-19 vaccination appointment waitlist.

**or**

Yes! Please complete this screening form to see if you currently qualify to receive the vaccine.

1. **I’ve already had COVID-19. Do I still need to be immunized?**

People who have recovered from COVID-19 have [shown a difference in antibody levels over the same time period](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6947a2.htm). That means that we don’t know how long your antibody levels will remain sufficient enough to combat re-infection.

Immunity from the vaccine, however, created a consistent level of antibodies over the same time period. ([New England Journal of Medicine](https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2032195))

The CDC recommends that everyone gets vaccinated. If you’ve been infected with COVID recently, you can delay the vaccine up to 90 days from initial infection. ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html))

1. **I had COVID-19 and was treated with Regeneron’s monoclonal antibody cocktail. Can I still get the shot?**

[According to the CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/meetings/downloads/slides-2020-12/slides-12-12/COVID-03-Mbaeyi.pdf), if you received Regeneron’s monoclonal antibody cocktail you should wait at least 90 days before being vaccinated. This is a precautionary measure until additional information becomes available.

1. **Do I have to do anything after my vaccine?**

Make sure to get proper rest and stay hydrated. You should also continue to follow safety guidelines, like wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, avoiding travel, and staying home if you feel sick.

1. **Can I drink alcohol shortly after getting the vaccine?**

While there is no evidence that drinking alcohol during the vaccination period will blunt the vaccine’s effectiveness ([Providence Journa](https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/local/2020/12/11/ok-drink-alcohol-after-covid-vaccine/3896100001/)l), studies have shown a tie between excessive alcohol consumption and a depressed immune system response. ([National Center for Biotechnology Information](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17922947/)). Since the vaccine will require your immune system to build antibodies, it’s smart to give it all the support you can.

1. **Am I “tracked” if I get the vaccine?**

Anytime a healthcare provider administers a vaccine -- whether it’s for measles, HPV, or other diseases -- the information is [entered into the Immunization Information System](https://www.immunize.org/askexperts/documenting-vaccination.asp) (IIS).

The CDC monitors how the vaccine is distributed to make sure that the supply is distributed honestly and transparently. They also want to keep track of how many people are vaccinated to assess the progress U.S. states are making, and to determine when we may have reached herd immunity levels.

Healthcare providers must regularly supply their state government with vaccination data -- like dosage lot numbers that track supply usage, and whether or not the recipient has a comorbidity.

All information is shared securely and follows the privacy and protection rules enforced by HIPAA laws. You can [learn more about reporting here](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/vaccination-provider-support.html).

1. **Should my children be vaccinated?**

Per the CDC, people aged 16 and older may receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. People 18 and older can receive the Moderna vaccine. Children were not studied for this vaccine. ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html))

1. **I’m pregnant. Should I get the vaccine, or not?**

Because no pregnant women were part of testing and trials, we have no data on how the vaccine affects pregnant women or their pregnancies. However, pregnant women are able to get the vaccine if they choose.

**What to Expect**

1. **What should I expect on appointment day?**

**[Custom Message]**

Please arrive on time and be sure to use our zero-contact check-in process on your mobile device upon arrival. We ask that you remain in your vehicle until further instruction.

Remember: if you are showing up for your first dose of the vaccine, it is extremely important that you schedule a visit for your second and final dose.

1. **What happens after my first shot?**

Your body will already start to build an immune response after the first vaccine. You may experience some mild side effects, like soreness at the site of injection.

**[Custom Message]**

Our office will check in with you via text to make sure you’re feeling OK. Feel free to schedule a telehealth visit with us if you have concerns following your first shot.

1. **What are the side effects, and when should I call the doctor about my side effects?**

You may not experience any side effects, but if you do, they typically start within 12 to 24 hours of vaccination.

Common side effects include headache, fatigue, muscle aches, chills, joint pain, and a mild fever. You may also feel soreness at the injection site. Side effects don’t usually last more than a few days.

Just 15% of people reported short-lived symptoms at the site of the injection, and 50% reported one or more reactions like headache, chills, fatigue, muscle pain or fever, which only lasted for a day or two. ([Mayo Clinic](https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/featured-topic/covid-19-vaccine-myths-debunked))

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends contacting your provider if the redness or tenderness at the injection site increases after 24 hours, if side effects remain for more than a few days, or if they are causing you concern. ([Johns Hopkins](https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/12/18/vaccine-side-effects-what-to-expect/))

1. **Are there long-term side effects?**

Since the vaccines have been studied for 6 months, there is no data beyond that time frame -- but unexpected long-term safety issues have never occurred following a vaccine’s licensure, even after decades of study. ([UC Davis Health](https://health.ucdavis.edu/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccine/index.html))

We do know that COVID-19 can cause long-term health issues in some patients, like reduced lung function and [kidney damage](https://www.ajmc.com/view/most-americans-unaware-of-covid19s-effects-on-the-kidneys).

The FDA and CDC have systems in place for reporting and tracking side effects.

1. **Am I immune immediately?**

No, it takes a few weeks after the second dose to reach 95% immunity.

**Current Misinformation**

1. **The vaccine is microchipped.**

There is no microchip technology in the vaccine. This is a myth that spread after some people misunderstood a statement made by Bill Gates about certification of vaccine records. In fact, the microchip technology mentioned in this myth does not yet exist. ([Mayo Clinic](https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/featured-topic/covid-19-vaccine-myths-debunked))

1. **The vaccine changes your DNA.**

The COVID-19 vaccine does not alter people's DNA. The vaccine tells your cells how to kill the COVID-19 virus. After delivery, those instructions are destroyed. While it’s considered “new,” mRNA technology has existed for a decade. ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/mrna-vaccine-basics.html))

1. **The vaccine was rushed and therefore is not safe.**

Given the urgent need for a vaccine, pharmaceutical companies and the government devoted huge resources to its development. These resources, along with advances in scientific research, are what allowed for the quick creation of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The COVID-19 vaccine had to meet extensive criteria and rigorous testing for emergency use authorization, which include following at least half of the study’s participants for at least two months.

The FDA reviewed the vaccine for safety. A panel of safety experts with the Advisory Committee on Immunization independently reviewed data from the clinical trial to ensure the vaccine’s safety. The FDA and CDC continue to monitor the safety of the vaccine.

([Mayo Clinic](https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/featured-topic/covid-19-vaccine-myths-debunked))

1. **The vaccine causes infertility.**

There is no link between the COVID-19 vaccine and infertility. This myth was widely shared via a social media post containing false information. ([AFP Fact Check](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/10/technology/pfizer-vaccine-infertility-disinformation.html))

In fact, 23 women became pregnant after participating in Pfizer’s mRNA vaccine trial. ([Nebraska Medicine](https://www.nebraskamed.com/COVID/you-asked-we-answered-can-mrna-vaccines-cause-infertility))

It is also worth noting that no other existing vaccine using the same mechanism as the COVID-19 vaccine has ever been linked to infertility.