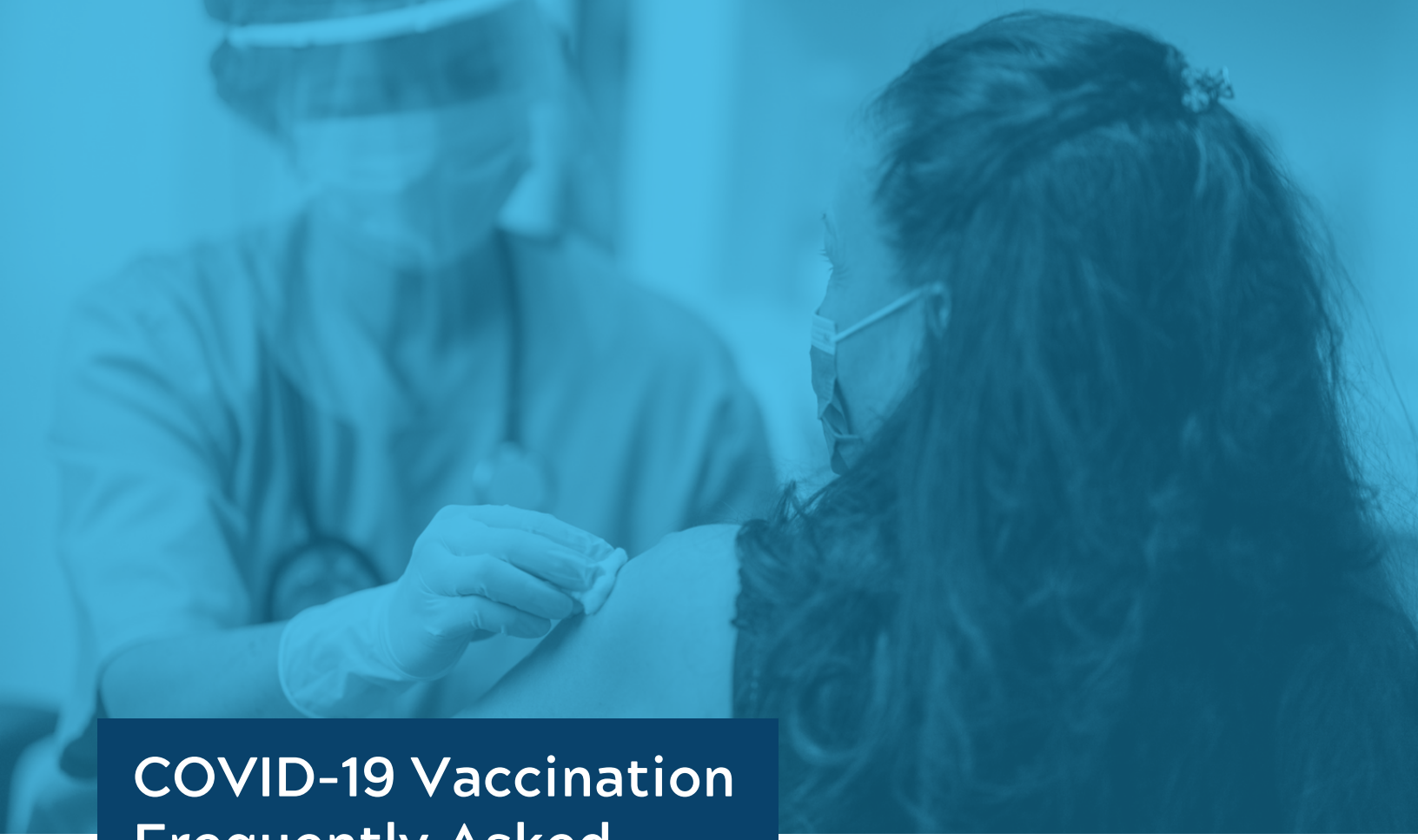

# COVID-19 Vaccination Frequently Asked Questions

COVID-19 vaccines will be an important way to slow the spread of the disease. The CDC website is the best resource for COVID-19 information. This document has been created with input from GBS and health care partners. Anyone with a question about their particular situation should consult with their own health care provider.

## What is a vaccine?

A vaccine is a substance that stimulates your immune system to make antibodies - blood proteins produced in response to a foreign substance - as it would if you were exposed to the actual disease. After vaccination, you develop immunity to the disease, so you are protected from getting sick if you get infected.

## Are eggs involved in the making of the COVID-19 vaccines?

Unlike some other vaccines, eggs are not involved in the COVID-19 vaccines that have been authorized by the FDA to date.

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## How do the vaccines work?

The vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech (Pfizer) and Moderna use a technique known as mRNA, or messenger RNA. These vaccines "give instructions for our cells to make a harmless piece of what is called the *spike protein*," according to the CDC. This protein is found on the surface of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

Once these vaccine instructions, or mRNA, are injected, your cells use them to make the spike protein; then the instructions are broken down and eliminated. The protein piece is displayed on the cell surface, triggering our immune system to make antibodies against it, just as it would if it were exposed to the real coronavirus that causes COVID-19. In this way, the body learns how to protect itself when and if the real virus shows up.

The mRNA vaccines don't use the live virus that causes COVID-19, nor does the mRNA get into the cell's nucleus, which is where our DNA (genetic material) is stored. More information can be found on the CDC website.

## How did the vaccine get developed and approved so fast? Was this process rushed?

Producing a vaccine against COVID-19 has been the top priority of scientists and governments around the world to help bring an end to the pandemic since early 2020. With the coordinated and enormous investment of resources, development of these vaccines has been accelerated.

Vaccines have been studied for over 100 years and have proven to be safe. The FDA's authorized this for Emergency Use as the risk of the vaccine is substantially lower than both the short and long-term consequences of COVID-19.

## What is an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)?

An Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) is a mechanism to facilitate the availability and use of medical countermeasures, including vaccines, during public health emergencies, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Under an EUA, FDA may allow the use of medical products that have undergone a streamlined approval process in an emergency to diagnose, treat, or prevent serious or life-threatening diseases or conditions when certain statutory criteria have been met, including that there are no adequate, approved, and available alternatives.

## After the FDA's emergency use authorization (EUA) is granted, are the vaccines still tracked?

Yes. The FDA expects the manufacturers to continue their clinical trials to find out more about how safe and effective they are and pursue full FDA approval or licensure. The EUA, which is different from FDA approval, is based on the FDA's evaluation of available evidence, assessing risks and benefits. It issues the EUA if the benefit-risk balance is favorable.

## Are there any health concerns if we receive the vaccine?

There is a remote chance that the COVID-19 Vaccine could cause a severe allergic reaction that would usually occur within a few minutes to one hour after getting the vaccine. Vaccination administration sites should have personnel available who can respond to questions and provide urgent care, if needed.

At this time, the FDA recommends that the following individuals should not get the vaccine: Those who had a severe allergic reaction after a previous dose of the vaccine, or who have had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient of the vaccine. The FDA will continue monitoring the population for rarer and/or more serious side effects than were seen in the clinical trials.

## How many doses do you need?

Two doses are needed for each of the “frontrunner” vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer.

## Will receiving the vaccine make me immune to the virus immediately?

The peak response appears to be 1-2 weeks after the second dose of vaccine.

## What is the interval between doses?

For the Moderna vaccine, two doses are given 4 weeks apart. For Pfizer's vaccine, the two doses are given 3 weeks apart. The government and the manufacturers have partnered with countries who plan to use the vaccines to make sure there are enough doses available for everyone to get two.

## What should I do to keep from getting the virus between doses?

Continue practicing COVID-19 preventive measures. Wear face masks, wash hands, avoid gatherings, social distance, and public health guidelines.

## What happens if you don't take the second dose?

Protection is assumed to be less. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are believed to be around 50% effective after just one dose.

## After receiving the vaccine do I need to worry about giving the virus to family members in my household? Especially if I have an immunocompromised family member(s)?

Viral shedding occurs when a virus replicates inside your body and is released into the environment. Neither of the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) nor the other leading vaccine candidates (AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson) contain active SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19). Therefore, the vaccine itself does not cause viral shedding.

However, we still do not know the degree to which these vaccines will prevent infection and transmission of the virus that causes the disease. Further study will better answer this question. Because of this, vaccinated individuals should continue with COVID-19 precautions.

## Is the vaccine effective?

Current data shows that both the Pfizer vaccine and Moderna vaccines are 95% effective in preventing the person from getting COVID-19. At this time, it is not known precisely how long COVID-19 vaccines are effective.

Clinical and scientific experts will constantly monitor and evaluate the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccine(s) based on data and guidance from agencies at the national, state, and local levels. They are committed to making informed recommendations and decisions with the best interest of the public in mind.

## How long does the protection last?

Because the vaccines are new, this is not yet known for sure. Based on other viruses that are similar to the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, the COVID-19 vaccines that are shown to be highly effective might protect people for a few years.

## Are there any side effects from the vaccine?

People should expect to have some side effects, similar to what some people report after getting a flu vaccine, according to experts meeting recently with the CDC. These experts said to expect temporary side effects such as soreness in your arm where you got the shot, fatigue, body aches, and perhaps a fever.

Note that more people felt side effects after the second dose than the first dose. Some people who received the vaccine reported worse fevers and aches than others. Side effects were usually short-lived and able to be managed with fever-reducing medications, such as Tylenol.

## I already had COVID-19, should I get the vaccine?

Because it is not known how long immunity to COVID-19 lasts after you have had the illness, it is recommended that individuals who had COVID-19 still get the vaccine. The CDC have indicated that people who have had COVID-19 may still benefit from getting vaccinated.

However, if you have tested positive for COVID-19 and still have symptoms, you should wait until you are recovered and feel well before you get the vaccine.

## Do the COVID-19 vaccines not only keep the person from getting sick, but also from spreading the virus if exposed?

That is not yet known. As more data and monitoring are done, experts will be able to find out if a vaccinated person, if exposed to the virus, can still spread the infection even if they don't get the disease themselves.

## Will I still need to wear a mask and physically distance after receiving the vaccine?

Yes, at least until the presence of the virus in the community is diminished enough that public health officials remove restrictions. The hope is that the sooner a critical mass of people are vaccinated, the sooner virus infections will recede.

While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it will be important for everyone to continue using all the tools available to us to help stop this pandemic, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often, and staying at least six feet away from others outside of your household.

Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following CDC's recommendations for how to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19. Experts need to understand more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide before deciding to change recommendations on steps everyone should take to slow the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. Other factors, including how many people get vaccinated and how the virus is spreading in communities, will also affect this decision.

In addition, we still do not know the degree to which these vaccines will prevent infection and transmission. The clinical vaccine trials were designed to initially determine if the vaccines prevent COVID-19 illness - which is easier to measure than whether a participant was ever infected with the coronavirus at all. It is possible that people who are vaccinated and then exposed to SARS-CoV-2 may develop clinically silent infection and shed virus. Further study will better answer this question. Until we know if the vaccines prevent transmission, vaccinated individuals should assume they may still become infected and contagious, and should continue masking and taking other COVID-19 precautions accordingly.

## Are the vaccines free?

Yes, for patients, but the health care providers will bill insurance companies.

## Will it be possible to choose which vaccine you prefer?

Most likely, no. In general, it does not matter, since once a vaccine gets the FDA's emergency use authorization (EUA), they all work. And even as more vaccines become authorized and available, you may have only one choice.

## If a vaccine needs two doses, can you switch to another vaccine for the second one?

No. Experts advise staying with the same vaccine for both. That's true even for the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, which use the same general approach yet are different.

## How much of the population needs to be vaccinated for so-called herd immunity?

Herd protection is not a goal of the initial rounds of vaccine deployment. Only once population-wide vaccination is a reality would herd protection be even considered.

## What happens if someone is in the first phase of vaccine distribution and other members of the household are not? How should they be kept safe?

While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it will be important for everyone to continue using all the tools available to us to help stop this pandemic, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often, and staying at least 6 feet away from others. For more information, see the CDC's Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination.

## After I get vaccinated, do I still have to wear a mask?

Yes. Even after vaccination increases, preventive behaviors will still be needed. The ability to reduce transmission will require not just high vaccine uptake, but ongoing social distancing and masks.

*Remember to take steps to protect yourself now. Make sure you are following these simple steps to help protect your health:*

- *Get a flu shot*
- *Make sure doctor visits are up to date*
- *Wear a mask*
- *Continue to socially distance*
- *Wash your hands*

## Where can I learn more about the vaccines?

To learn more about COVID-19 vaccines, please click the Manufacturer Product Information link on the CDC website.

## Why are health care workers being prioritized?

Health care personnel continue to be on the front line of the nation's fight against the pandemic. Early vaccine access is critical to ensuring the health and safety of this essential workforce of approximately 21 million people, protecting not only them but also their patients, communities, and the broader health of our country.

## Am I required to get a vaccine?

No. Being vaccinated is voluntary.

## Where can I get a vaccine?

We are working to identify vaccination distribution sites and will share updates as we learn more.

## How will I know when I can get the vaccine?

The CDC has developed general criteria for vaccination after healthcare workers and long-term care facility residents. Each state will be responsible for refining these criteria, and many states have published their plans. Most likely states will prioritize essential workers and the elderly. It is likely that phase 1b of immunization of these individuals won't begin until February or March.

## Information for Women & Children

### Is the vaccine safe if you are pregnant or breastfeeding?

Safety of the vaccine in pregnant women or women who are breastfeeding is unknown. Pregnant women were not allowed to enter the recent trials although a few became pregnant during the trial and no issues have been reported. The Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine recommends that the vaccine be offered to pregnant and breast-feeding women who would otherwise qualify. You are strongly encouraged to speak with your doctor about your specific situation.

### Are vaccines recommended for pregnant or nursing women?

There are no restrictions based on pregnancy and breastfeeding status. However, Pregnant women have an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 and there is a risk for moms transmitting COVID-19 to babies, likely after birth and not during pregnancy. The Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine recommends that the vaccine be offered to pregnant and breast-feeding women who would otherwise qualify. You are strongly encouraged to speak with your doctor about your specific situation.

### Is the vaccine safe for children?

There is currently no data on the safety of the vaccine for children. It is very likely that the response in teenagers will be similar to adults. Pfizer is currently recruiting children for pediatric clinical trials right now. The company plans to recruit 2,000 kids between 12-15 and 600 teens between 16-17.

*January 2021*

*The information herein is educational only and not intended as legal advice.*

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