



COVID-19 Immunization Overview & FAQ

Tested, safe, and effective COVID-19 vaccines will help us defeat the virus, get back in control of our lives, and back to the people and places we love.

Scientists had a head start. The vaccines were built upon years of work in developing vaccines for similar viruses. No short cuts were made in the development of the vaccine and through massive cooperation of the best minds in science all over the world, we now have a vaccine that can shield us from getting COVID-19. Just like the unprecedented global pandemic we are in now, the COVID-19 immunization is an unprecedented and exciting development for the health of the public.

If I had COVID-19, do I need to get the vaccine?

Yes. While we know that it is very good at preventing illness in the person who gets vaccinated, we do not yet know if it prevents asymptomatic infection or transmission of infection to others. Due to the severe health risks associated with coronavirus and the fact that re-infection is possible, people should get a vaccine even if they have been sick with COVID-19 before. The immunity someone gains from having an infection varies from person to person and some early evidence suggests it may not last very long.

Once I get vaccinated, can I stop wearing my mask and stop following the other public health recommendations?

Even after getting vaccinated, it is still important to wear your mask and continue to follow public health guidance to protect yourself and others (e.g., the 3Ws, avoiding crowds, quarantining after exposure, etc.) Protection from the vaccine is not immediate;

the first vaccines that will be available are each 2-dose series and it will take 1-2 weeks following the 2nd dose to be considered fully vaccinated.

If I still have to follow the 3Ws and all the other public health recommendations, why bother getting vaccinated?

Vaccines work with your immune system so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. The two vaccines, that are likely to be available initially, have been found to be highly protective against COVID-19 illness, including severe illness. Other steps, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask and staying at least 6 feet away from others, help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others.

If I'm high-risk due to chronic health issues, should I get the vax?

Yes, we strongly recommend it. Some underlying and chronic health conditions increase your risk for severe COVID-19 illness. Clinical trials found that the vaccines were as safe and protective against COVID-19 illness in persons with underlying medical conditions compared to persons without these chronic health conditions. If you have concerns, talk to your healthcare provider.

Are there potential side effects?

Side effects following COVID 19 vaccination can include injection site pain, redness and swelling; fever; feeling very tired; headache; chills; muscle aches and joint pain. Most are mild to moderate in severity, occur within the first 3 days of vaccination, and resolve within 1-2 days of onset. These side effects were more commonly reported after the second dose than after the first dose and were generally more frequent and severe in persons aged 18-55 years than in those aged >55 years.

Are there any allergy/anaphylaxis concerns?

Anyone with a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient of the COVID-19 vaccine or after a previous dose of the same vaccine should not receive it. The ingredients of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine are: mRNA, 4 lipids (including polyethylene glycol or PEG), potassium chloride, monobasic potassium phosphate, sodium chloride, dibasic sodium phosphate dehydrate, and sucrose. The vaccine contains no preservatives. Those who have had severe anaphylactic reactions to prior vaccines or injectable medications can still get the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, but ideally should first talk to their provider about their prior reaction. The discussion should also review the risks of having a severe allergic reaction to this vaccine versus the benefits of vaccination. These individuals should be monitored for 30 minutes following COVID vaccination (compared to 15 minutes for all others receiving the vaccine). Anyone with a history of anaphylaxis

or other allergic reaction due to other things that aren't injectable medications or vaccines (like shellfish, food, latex, pollen, animal dander or stings, etc.) does NOT need to take any special precaution and should get vaccinated. They will only have to be observed for 15 minutes post-vaccination.

What should pregnant/breastfeeding persons do about getting the vaccine?

There are no data yet on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy. However, the initial vaccines available are mRNA vaccines, which are not thought to be a risk to the developing fetus. Getting COVID-19 during pregnancy increases the risk of severe illness (ICU admission, mechanical ventilation and death) and may lead to an increased risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as preterm birth. There are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in lactating persons or the effects of mRNA vaccines on the breastfed infant or milk production, but mRNA vaccines are not thought to be a risk to the breastfeeding infant. If a lactating person is part of a group who is in a priority group for a COVID-19 vaccine, they may choose to be vaccinated. A discussion with their healthcare provider can help them make an informed decision.

In closing, the decision to get a COVID vaccine is a personal choice and we encourage people who have questions to talk with their primary care provider or seek information from scientific sources like the CDC. Remember that if you don't get immunized against COVID-19, you will remain at risk of illness and severe disease. The fairly minor side effects of the vaccine are nothing in comparison to the potential harm from COVID-19 illness. We encourage our community to step up when it is their time for the COVID-19 immunization.