FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: COVID-19 VACCINES

Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

For the vast majority of people, the benefits of preventing a COVID-19 infection outweigh the risks of the vaccine. The vaccine helps protect you from getting COVID-19 and is considered a safe way to build protection against the disease. COVID-19 can have serious, life-threatening complications, and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you or your loved ones. If you still get infected, the vaccine may prevent serious illness and death. By getting vaccinated, you are helping to protect yourself, your family and friends.

Which vaccine should I take?

It is recommended that all individuals ages 5 years and older receive a single 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine (either Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, or Novavax). All U.S. COVID-19 vaccines have passed the same rigorous review process, and all are highly effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19. If you have concerns about your medical condition(s) and receiving the vaccine, consult with your physician.

Will I need a booster dose?

Individuals aged 65 years and older should receive 1 additional dose of an updated COVID-19 vaccine at least 4 months after the previous updated dose.

If infected with COVID-19, what is the timing of receiving the updated vaccine?

For anyone who has been infected with COVID-19, their next dose may be delayed 3 months from when symptoms started or, if they did not have symptoms, when they received a positive test. Consult with your health care provider if you have any questions about the timing of your vaccination.

Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. None of the COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the U.S. contain the live virus that causes COVID-19.

Will I test positive once I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

No. Viral tests such as PCR used to diagnose COVID-19 check samples from the respiratory system for the presence of the virus that causes COVID-19. Since the vaccines do not contain the live virus, they will not affect your PCR test result. However, it typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination. Therefore, it is possible to test positive if you were infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination.

It is possible you may test positive on some antibody tests if your body develops an immune response. Positive antibody tests can indicate you had a previous infection or vaccination and that you may have some level of protection against the virus. Antibody (Ab) testing is used in highly specialized situations (e.g., studies and surveillance) and should not be utilized to inform vaccination for employees.

Should I get vaccinated if I already had COVID-19?

Yes. Experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Even if you have already recovered from COVID-19, it is possible that you could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 again. Receiving the vaccine when you have already had COVID-19 significantly enhances your immune protection and further reduces your risk of reinfection. For anyone who has been infected with COVID-19, their next dose may be delayed 3 months from when symptoms started or, if they did not have symptoms, when they received a positive test. Consult with your health care provider if you have any questions about the timing of your vaccination.

If I am pregnant, can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. There is currently no evidence that antibodies formed from COVID-19 vaccination cause any problem with pregnancy, including the development of the placenta. Also, people who are trying to become pregnant now or who plan to try in the future may receive the COVID-19 vaccine. There is no evidence that fertility problems are a side effect of any of the COVID-19 vaccines. See ACOG's practice advisory at: https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/practice-advisory/articles/2020/12/covid-19-vaccination-considerations-for-obstetric-gynecologic-care and CDC's recommendations on COVID vaccination for pregnant women at: https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s0811-vaccine-safe-pregnant.html.

Are there any side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. As with many vaccines, there may be mild side effects (pain/swelling in the arm where you received the shot, fever, chills, fatigue, and headache). Side effects should only last a few days. There are rare side effects that have occurred, but at the current time, there are no common, severe side effects that have been reported despite millions of vaccine administrations.

If I have side effects from COVID-19 vaccination, can I return to my workplace?

You should be able to return to your workplace after receiving the vaccine. Most people who get the vaccine have mild or no side effects. For those who have side effects, they may uncommonly affect your ability to do some daily activities. If you experience a fever after vaccination, you may need to stay home from work and may need further evaluation.

Are there long-term side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

It will take more time to learn about very rare or possible long-term side effects. However, safety data have been collected for years for all authorized vaccines. It is unusual for vaccine side effects to appear more than 8 weeks after vaccination. Vaccines do not generally have long-term side effects and there is no reason to believe the COVID-19 vaccine will be an exception. Systems are in place at the CDC to monitor for safety issues across the country.

Should I take Tylenol or Motrin before my vaccine dose?

Talk to a doctor about taking over-the-counter medications, such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, aspirin (only for people ages 18 years or older), or antihistamines for any pain and discomfort experienced after getting vaccinated.

How much will it cost for me to get the vaccine?

Vaccines are now covered by insurance, including Medicare and Medicaid and therefore, there is no out-of-pocket costs to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Adults who are uninsured and underinsured have access to vaccines through the federal initiative – Bridge Access Program (https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/bridge/).

Will I be required to get vaccinated for work?

It depends. Check with your employer to see if they have any rules that apply to you.

Is the vaccine safe since it was developed so quickly?

Yes. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves a vaccine for use only if there are enough data to suggest that it is safe and effective; this is after clinical trials have been conducted with thousands of people of various ages, races, and ethnicities and when the benefits outweigh risks. Every study and every phase of every trial was carefully reviewed and approved by a safety board and the FDA. The process was transparent and rigorous, with continual oversight and expert approval. The FDA will continue to monitor and oversee vaccine production to ensure all safety protocols are followed. The FDA and CDC also collect and analyze information from reports of any side effects that may occur after a vaccine has been licensed.

How long will vaccine immunity last?

Studies are ongoing and experts are working to learn more about both natural immunity and vaccine-induced immunity. Research shows that FDA-authorized or approved vaccines are effective at reducing the risk of severe COVID-19 disease. Getting COVID-19 also provides infection-induced immunity. The length of protection is unclear for either vaccination or infection-induced immunity, although there is consistent evidence suggesting that immunity may decline with time. Protection may be the greatest from 2-6 weeks after vaccination. After 2-3 months, protection against infection wanes significantly. However, protection against severe disease lasts much longer. An annual COVID-19 immunization restores the protection of vaccines that wanes over time. Updated vaccines have been designed to protect against the latest variants circulating. They have been proven to generate a strong immune-system response, 10 to 17 times higher against current variants, compared to before vaccination.

If the vaccine is effective, why are there reports of infections and death among those vaccinated?

No vaccine is 100% effective against preventing infection. But, we do know that the COVID-19 vaccine is highly effective against serious illness, hospitalizations, and deaths. Severe outcomes and deaths are increasingly only being experienced in either the unvaccinated and/or severely immunocompromised individuals (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html).

Do I still need to wear a mask after receiving the vaccine?

Fully vaccinated individuals may participate in many activities that they participated in prior to the pandemic but for some of these activities, they may have to resume masking based on state and local ordinances. There may be masking recommendations for all individuals based on employer policies or state and local ordinances.

For additional questions, consult with your health care provider.

References

- The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. *Practice Advisory: COVID-19 Vaccination Considerations for Obstetric–Gynecologic Care*. September 25, 2023. Available at: https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/practice-advisory/articles/2020/12/covid-19-vaccination-considerations-for-obstetric-gynecologic-care.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination*. October 4, 2023. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Stay Up to Date with COVID-19 Vaccines*. March 7, 2024. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Use of COVID-19 Vaccines in the United States - Interim Clinical Considerations*. September 15, 2023. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/clinical-considerations/covid-19-vaccines-us.html.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *New CDC Data: COVID-19 Vaccination Safe for Pregnant People*. August 11, 2021. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s0811-vaccine-safe-pregnant.html.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine. September 22, 2023. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Updated COVID-19 Vaccine Recommendations are Now Available*. September 12, 2023. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/covid-vaccine-recommendations-9-12-2023.html?utm_medium=email&_hsmi=274145070&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-90uyU3GjyYuzgUC5XgS41lgYJwZChXQ0cIG0qXSceMbdiucnRmH9MM9WkBp2EdEzITna_lCYZMmTXPbFl-xnROSiso9A&utm_content=274145070&utm_source=hs_email.
- Menegale F, Manica M, Zardini A, et al. Evaluation of waning of SARS-CoV-2 vaccine–induced immunity: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2023;6(5):e2310650. Available at: https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2804451.
- U.S. Food & Drug Administration. *FDA Approves First COVID-19 Vaccine*. August 23, 2021. Available at: https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-covid-19-vaccine.

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
OCCUPATIONAL AND
ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE

