

COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

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What is COVID-19? COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person and has spread worldwide over the past few months. Although there are many types of human coronaviruses, including some that commonly cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses, COVID-19 is a new disease, caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans. COVID-19 can have serious, life-threatening complications, and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you, and if you get sick, you could spread the disease to friends, family, and others around you.

When will a COVID-19 vaccine be available? CDC is providing recommendations to federal, state, and local governments about who should be vaccinated first. CDC's recommendations are based on recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), an independent panel of medical and public health experts. The CDC is committed to having enough vaccines for everyone that wants to be vaccinated. Healthcare facilities are slated to get a vaccine delivery for patients in February/March.

Who will be receiving the vaccine first? Massachusetts has developed a vaccine distribution plan based on recommendations from the CDC and ACIP. In Massachusetts vaccines will be distributed in 3 phases:

- **During Phase 1**, healthcare personnel and long-term care facility residents will be vaccinated first, followed by first responders (EMS, Fire, and Police).
- **During Phase 2** (expected between February-April), vaccines will be distributed to those age 75+, and individuals with health conditions that put them at high risk of hospitalization, severe illness, and death from COVID-19. Phase 2 will then continue and vaccines will be distributed to additional frontline essential workers (food and agricultural workers, United States Postal Service workers, manufacturing workers, grocery store workers, public transit workers, and those who work in the educational sector). All those 65+ are the final group included in Phase 2.
- **During Phase 3** (expected between April-June), the vaccine will be made available to the general public.

Is a COVID-19 vaccination a safe way to help build protection? How safe is the vaccine? Clinical trials of all vaccines must first show they are safe and effective before any vaccine can be authorized or approved for use, including COVID-19 vaccines. The known and potential benefits of a COVID-19 vaccine must outweigh the known and potential risks of the vaccine for use under what is known as an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). CDC also developed a new tool, "v-safe", as an additional layer of safety monitoring to increase the ability to rapidly detect any safety issues with COVID-19 vaccines. V-safe is a new smartphone-based, after-vaccination health checker for all people who receive COVID-19 vaccines.

Should my family and I get a COVID-19 vaccine? All COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States have been shown to be highly effective at preventing COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an antibody (immune system) response without having to experience sickness. Getting vaccinated yourself may also protect people around you, particularly people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Should I get vaccinated if I already had COVID-19? Getting the COVID-19 vaccine is not contraindicated in those who have already had COVID-19. After having COVID-19, there is no risk of re-infection within 90 days. However, experts do not know how much longer after 90 days one is protected. Because experts do not know if having had the illness will provide long term protection from reinfection, it is recommended for this group of people to get vaccinated. According to an update from the CDC, these people are not required to wait 90 days after illness/testing positive to get the vaccine. They can receive the vaccine once they are feeling better and are out of isolation/quarantine.

Who should not get a COVID-19 vaccine? Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction after a previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in the COVID-19 vaccine.

How many shots of the COVID-19 vaccine are needed? Both the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine require two doses to optimally protect against the illness. The booster dose must be from the same vaccine manufacturer as the initial dose. Because the first dose only provides partial protection, it is possible to get COVID-19 before having received the second dose. In these cases, people should still receive the booster dose as scheduled as long as they are feeling better and are out of isolation/quarantine.

- Pfizer vaccine – 2 doses 21 days apart
- Moderna vaccine – 2 doses 28 days apart

How is the Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine given? The vaccine is given as an injection into the muscle just like a flu shot.

Why is a vaccine needed if we all take the necessary precautions like mask-wearing, hand washing and social distancing? Stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines work with your immune system, so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Other steps, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask, hand washing and social distancing, help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others.

Can I stop wearing a mask and social distancing if I get vaccinated? No, the CDC recommends the use of these additional precautions until more research has been completed. Other factors, including how many people get vaccinated and how the virus is spreading in communities, will also affect the decision.

Should I get the vaccine if I am pregnant? Although trials testing the vaccine in pregnant and breastfeeding women have not been completed, for most, getting the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible is the safest choice.

COVID-19 is a more dangerous illness for pregnant women. COVID-19 patients who are pregnant are 5 times more likely to end up in the intensive care unit (ICU) or on a ventilator than COVID-19 patients who are not pregnant.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that the COVID-19 vaccine should not be withheld from pregnant individuals who meet criteria for vaccination.

Does receiving the vaccine affect breastfeeding? The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine reports that there is no reason to believe that the vaccine affects the safety of breastmilk. Since the vaccine does

not contain the virus, there is no risk of breastmilk containing the virus. The antibodies formed from getting the vaccine could pass into the breastmilk and then to the baby. This may protect the baby early on from a COVID-19 infection.

What happens if I miss my second dose? Persons who miss getting their booster dose because of illness, travel, etc, should get the booster dose as soon as they can. There is no maximum interval between the first and second doses for either vaccine, so it is not necessary to restart the vaccine series.

How long should I wait to get the vaccine after receiving Monoclonal Antibody Treatment for COVID-19? Vaccination should be deferred for at least 90 days as a precautionary measure, in order to avoid any potential interference with the vaccine-induced immune response.

If you would like more information about the vaccine, please visit the CDC website, [CDC.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html).