

## COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions January 6, 2021

**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?** Early evidence suggests natural immunity from COVID-19 may not last very long, but more studies are needed to understand this better. Those with prior COVID-19 infection are still eligible and encouraged to get the vaccine, provided that you are no longer under quarantine or isolation and you are feeling better.

**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 Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines are given in two doses, so a second appointment will be made at the time of the first vaccine shot appointment.

- 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.

**If I am pregnant or breastfeeding, should I receive the vaccine?** If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it is recommended that you discuss your options with your healthcare provider.

**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.

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).