

COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ

To date, millions of doctors, nurses, other health care providers and essential workers have received the vaccine. Millions more participated before that. As the vaccine begins to become more available, be reassured you are not the first. The vaccine has been found to be safe and protects you and your loved ones from COVID-19. People have asked great questions as they seek to learn more about the vaccine. This document provides answers by from trusted sources. Additional resources are also listed on page 3.

Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. The vaccine trials included more than 70,000 people. The vaccine's safety will be aggressively monitored by the FDA, US government, the vaccine manufacturers, as well as health care providers.

Is the vaccine effective?

Yes. The vaccines reduced the risk of COVID-19 illness by more than 94% compared to the people who received the placebo (water) one week after the second dose. In other words, you should assume minimum of 4 or 5 weeks after you initiate the vaccination series before you are fully protected. The vaccines provided protection across different ages, sex, race, ethnicity, and those with medical problems. Both vaccines require two doses to offer best protection. Efficacy after a single dose has not been evaluated.

Can I choose which vaccine I get?

Probably not. The Pfizer-BioNTech and the Moderna vaccines are remarkably similar and give high levels of protection. Both require two doses. They only differ in how they need to be stored -- with Pfizer-BioNTech needing to be stored at lower temperatures -- and in the timing of the second doses. The Pfizer-BioNTech doses are three weeks apart. The Moderna doses are four weeks apart. Both of your doses need to be from the same manufacturer. If you miss your second dose, get it at the earliest opportunity.

Will I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. The vaccine does not contain the coronavirus and will not give you COVID-19. The vaccine contains instructions that will help your body build protection from COVID-19.

Can I stop wearing my mask if I get vaccinated?

The clinical trials showed that vaccination protects people from symptomatic COVID-19. Until we know for sure that vaccination protects people from spreading the virus, and enough people are vaccinated so community immunity can be achieved, you will be required to wear a mask.



What might I feel after getting vaccinated?

Up to 70 percent of people who got the Pfizer-BioNTech or the Moderna shots reported some arm pain. Up to 50 percent of people briefly experienced one or more symptoms, including fever, fatigue, headaches, chills, or muscle or joint aches. For most people, any symptoms were short-lived and mild.

What about long-term safety?

Historically, most safety issues usually occur within six weeks of vaccination. The authorization of the COVID-19 vaccine was based on eight weeks of safety data. The vaccine trials are ongoing and vaccine safety will be continuously monitored for two years. In addition, there are several nation-wide vaccine safety monitoring systems that will track short and long-term safety as vaccines are rolled out to the public.

What is V-safe?

To further enhance COVID-19 vaccine safety monitoring, CDC has rolled out a new smartphone-based, after-vaccination health checker. It is called **V-safe**. It uses text messaging and web surveys from CDC to check in with COVID-19 vaccine recipients. It also provides second vaccine dose reminders if needed, and telephone follow up to anyone who reports medically significant (important) adverse events. You can register for V-safe by entering vsafe.cdc.gov on your smartphone (not computer) website browser.

How long will my immunity last?

At this point in time, we don't know how long the vaccine's immunity will last. However, we do know that protection lasts at least eight weeks after vaccination and it is expected to last longer based on measured immune responses. The vaccine will help protect you by creating immunity without having to experience sickness. At this point, we believe that population-wide vaccination is required to safely end the pandemic.

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Is it better to get immunity from a natural coronavirus infection?

COVID-19 can have serious, life-threatening complications, and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you. If you get sick, you could spread the disease to friends, family, and others around you. Getting COVID-19 may offer some natural protection, known as immunity, but experts don't know how long natural protection lasts, and the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 far outweighs any benefits of natural immunity.

Will this vaccine protect against the new, more transmissible variant of this coronavirus?

We believe so. And the presence of this variant – which evidence from the United Kingdom shows is up to 70 percent more infectious – should motivate us to get vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Is this new technology?

Scientists did not start the development of these vaccines from scratch. The mRNA technology is more than 30 years old and is not new. It has been used in numerous anti-cancer and anti-infectious disease vaccine candidates. These vaccines have been tested in thousands of people without any known harmful effects.

Will the vaccine alter my genetics?

The mRNA vaccine cannot alter your genetics. The message contained in the vaccine does not enter the cell nucleus, or the part of our cells where our genetic material is stored. The mRNA is destroyed quickly after it tells your cells to produce the spike protein that covers the coronavirus. This spike protein is what your immune cells will remember and recognize if you get exposed to coronavirus in the future. The vaccine will help protect you by creating immunity without having to experience sickness.

Who should not get the vaccine?

There are currently two vaccines that received FDA Emergency Use Authorization. The Pfizer/BioTech vaccine is authorized for use in people 16 years and older. The Moderna vaccine is authorized for use in people 18 years and older. People outside of these authorized ages and those with known allergies to components of the vaccine should not receive the vaccine.

Can I get the vaccine if I have allergies?

The vaccine is likely safe if your allergies are not to the components of the vaccine and if you do not have a history of severe, life-threatening allergic reactions to other vaccines. We encourage discussions with your doctor about the risks and benefits of the vaccine if you do have allergies.



Can I get the vaccine if I have an autoimmune disease?

Ask your doctor about your risk of COVID-19 and benefit of vaccination. The vaccine trials did not enroll enough people with autoimmune diseases or people on medications that weaken the immune system to establish vaccine safety and efficacy in this group.

Can I get the vaccine if I am pregnant?

Pregnant women are eligible to receive this vaccine. Pregnant women were excluded from enrolling in the trials, however some women did get pregnant and they had no known bad outcomes. There are certain groups, pregnant women being one of them, who will need to weigh the risks and benefits of vaccination versus getting COVID-19. There are additional studies underway in animals to more fully understand any possible effects of vaccine on pregnancy. If you have questions about the risk and benefit of vaccination to you, talk to your health care provider.

Will this vaccine make me infertile?

There is no reason to think that this vaccine will make you infertile and there is no evidence of infertility issues from clinical trials. A false claim has been circulating online that the new vaccine will threaten women's fertility by harming the placenta. This is not true. The false basis for this claim is the incorrect suggestion that the vaccine may cause you to make antibodies that cause the woman's own body to 'attack' a protein on the placenta. In fact, these proteins are so different (similar only in one very small region) and there is no reason to think that the same antibodies may lock onto both SARS-CoV-2 and the placenta. Further, natural infection with SARS-CoV-2 would cause you to make these same antibodies to the spike protein on the virus and there is no evidence that COVID-19 leads to miscarriages. The FDA requires companies to conduct reproductive toxicity studies in animals, which should be completed soon. We currently have no indication that the vaccine causes any issues with infertility.

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Can I get vaccinated if I'm having symptoms?

You don't have to be in perfectly good health at the time of vaccination. However, sniffles, fever or body aches could all be symptoms of COVID-19. If you are feeling ill the day you want to get vaccinated, the recommendation would be to get a COVID-19 test. If it's positive, wait until the end of your quarantine period to get the vaccine. This is so you don't expose the people who are giving the vaccines, or other community members.

How can I get the vaccine?

Thousands of health care providers will be able to offer vaccination of priority groups, including doctors' offices, retail pharmacies, hospitals, and federally qualified health centers. The State Department of Health will share additional information on where New Yorkers can get vaccinated as more vaccine doses become available.

When the vaccine becomes available to the general public — New York State officials determine the timing of this — local health departments will be setting up locations for you to receive the vaccine. Keep listening to local media outlets as we progress to subsequent phases.

Where do I fall in the priority list?

New York State has created a phased approach to distributing the vaccine based on need and risk. Both the federal government and NYS have stated that plans are underway to ensure everyone will be able to get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as large quantities are available. The website <https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/> updates the phases.

The first phase included high-risk hospital workers; residents and staff of nursing homes and other care facilities; federally qualified health center employees; EMS workers; coroners, medical examiners and certain funeral workers; staff and residents of OPWDD, OMH and OASAS facilities; urgent care providers; and individuals administering COVID-19 vaccines, including local health department staff.

The priority expanded on Jan. 4 and again on Jan. 11 to include all outpatient and ambulatory front-line, high-risk health care workers who provide direct in-person patient care; all staff who are in direct contact with patients; staff of nursing homes or skilled nursing facilities; and all front-line, high-risk public health workers who have direct contact with patients. This includes doctors in private practice, hospital-affiliated medical practices or public health clinics and their staff; registered nurses; specialty medical practices; dentists and orthodontists and their staff; psychiatrists and psychologists and their staff; physical therapists and their staff; pharmacists and pharmacy aides; home care workers and hospice workers; teachers and education workers; first responders; public safety workers; corrections workers; public transit workers; public-facing grocery store workers; and people age 65 and older.

This will continue to expand as more vaccine becomes available.



What if I will be in another state when the second dose is due?

When scheduling the first dose, you need to make sure you will be available for the second dose at the same location.

What if I become infected with COVID-19 after my first vaccine dose. When should I get my second dose?

As long as you have recovered and past 10 days from the onset of symptoms, it's OK to get vaccinated.

Should I get vaccinated if I already had COVID?

You are encouraged to get vaccinated, even if you had COVID-19 in the past. Clinical trials included people who previously had COVID-19, and the vaccines were shown to generate a strong immune response for them. Individuals who were treated with convalescent plasma or a monoclonal antibody drug, however, are recommended to wait 90 days from their treatment before they get vaccinated. This is meant to minimize interference with the immune response. Also, evidence suggests these treatments offer protection from infection for at least 90 days.

Was the vaccine development process rushed?

Although the process was fast, it was not rushed. The vaccine developments were faster than normal due to a willingness to take financial and the unprecedented scientific, government and industry collaborations. Regulatory processes were also streamlined, and vaccines proved effective in a short period of time because of the incredible amount of COVID-19 at the time the trials were run.

Was the process corrupted by politics?

No. The process for the development of the COVID-19 vaccines, except for speed, was much the same as other, historic vaccine and drug trials. Numerous external, objective, and dis-interested parties provided oversight and checks and balances throughout the development of the vaccines.

*This information was compiled by Upstate Medical University.
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Resources

About the vaccine in New York State

<https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/>

Phased distribution of the Vaccine in New York

<https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/phased-distribution-vaccine>

Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccinebenefits.html>

Fact Sheet: Explaining Operation Warp Speed | HHS.gov

<https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/explaining-operation-warp-speed/index.html>

10 Things Healthcare Professionals Need to Know about U.S. COVID-19 Vaccination Plans | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/vaccination.html>

FDA Emergency Use Authorization for Vaccines Explained | FDA

<https://www.fda.gov/media/143890/download>

The Path for a COVID-19 Vaccination from Research to Emergency Use Authorization | FDA

<https://www.fda.gov/vaccines-blood-biologics/vaccines/emergency-use-authorization-vaccines-explained>

Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19 Vaccination | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>

COVID-19 Vaccination For Healthcare Professionals Answering Patients' Questions | CDC

https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/answering-questions.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fvaccines%2Fhcp%2F covid-conversations%2Fanswering-questions.html

Ensuring the Safety of COVID-19 Vaccines in the United States | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety.html>

Emergency Use Authorization of COVID Vaccines – Safety and Efficacy Follow Up Considerations (perspective article) (Krause et al. 2020)

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2031373>



Pfizer-Biontech COVID-19 Vaccine Drug Label Information | NIH U.S. National Library of Medicine

<https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=908ecbe7-2f1b-42dd-94bf-f917ec3c5af8>

Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fvaccines%2Fvaccine-benefits%2Ffacts.html

Understanding How COVID-19 Vaccines Work | CDC

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/how-they-work.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fvaccines%2Fabout-vaccines%2Fhow-they-work.html

Understanding and Explaining mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/mrna-vaccine-basics.html>

Understanding mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html>

Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html>

Phased distribution of the Vaccine in New York

<https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/phased-distribution-vaccine>