COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

Vaccine Background and Info

What vaccines have been authorized by the FDA
Currently two vaccines have received Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the FDA.

- Pfizer-BioNTech: 2 doses, 3 weeks apart (age 16 years and older)
- Moderna: 2 doses, 4 weeks apart (age 18 years and older)

The FDA continues the process of evaluating other vaccine candidates for EUA.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?
Yes. COVID-19 vaccines are being held to the same rigorous safety and effectiveness standards as all other types of vaccines in the United States. The only COVID-19 vaccines the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will make available for use in the United States (by approval or emergency use authorization) are those that meet these standards. To learn more about different COVID-19 vaccines, click here.

This vaccine process was rushed. How do I trust that it is safe and has followed proper processes?
While this vaccine was developed quickly, that was a product of efficient work and unprecedented collaboration. All vaccines undergo a series of rigorous clinical trials using thousands of study participants to generate data and other information for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to determine their safety and effectiveness to approve or authorize for emergency use. Following approval or authorization, many vaccine safety monitoring systems watch for adverse events or possible side effects. To find more information on vaccine safety, please click here.

How effective are the vaccines?
Pfizer is reporting that their vaccine is 95% effective against COVID-19, with one vaccinated patient developing severe COVID infection. Moderna is reporting a 94.1% effectiveness against COVID-19 and 100% effectiveness against severe COVID-19 for their vaccine. Effectiveness for both vaccines were consistent across all age, race and ethnicity, and gender demographics. Both vaccines require two doses. Getting both doses is key to full vaccine effectiveness.

What are the expected side effects?
The most common adverse reactions included injection site pain and redness, fatigue, muscle and/or joint pain, headache, possibly even feeling poorly for a day or so. The COVID-19 vaccine does not give you COVID-19. These side effects show that the immune system is reacting the way it is supposed to fight the virus, should you become exposed. Based upon preliminary data, the first dose has fewer side effects than the second dose and older recipients experience fewer side effects.

Who can be vaccinated?
All adults older than 16 should consider receiving a vaccine, with very few exceptions. People who are pregnant and part of a group recommended to receive COVID-19 vaccine, such as healthcare personnel, may choose to be vaccinated. A conversation between pregnant patients and their clinicians may help them decide whether to get vaccinated.

Should children be vaccinated?
The FDA will determine what age groups and other populations are eligible for each vaccine. The Pfizer vaccine has been authorized for everyone 16 and older. The Moderna vaccine has been authorized for people 18 and older. Vaccine trials in younger children are underway.

If I have a pre-existing condition, should I be more cautious in receiving the vaccine?
Persons at risk for complications from COVID-19 infection are recommended to get vaccinated as soon as vaccine becomes available to them.

Have there been allergic reactions to the vaccine?
Anaphylactic (severe, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction) reactions in persons receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine have been reported. CDC considers a history of the following to be a contraindication to vaccination with both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines: Severe allergic reaction (e.g., anaphylaxis) after a previous dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine or any of its components, immediate allergic reaction of any severity to a previous dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine or any of its components, immediate allergic reaction of any severity to polysorbate. Click here for more information from the CDC. Individuals with history of other allergic reactions should still consider receiving the vaccine.

Persons receiving vaccine will be required to be observed for the following time periods:

- Persons with a history of an immediate allergic reaction of any severity to a vaccine or injectable therapy and persons with a history of anaphylaxis due to any cause: 30 minutes
- All other persons: 15 minutes

Click here for more information from the CDC. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have questions about taking the vaccine as a result of previous severe reactions to other vaccine.

How long will immunity last?
It is too early to determine how long immunity will last. On-going research is taking place to determine if any additional inoculations (besides the two initial injections) will be needed.

Science of the Vaccine: What's in it, How does it work, Reactions

Isn't it better to wait and see that it is working and safe before I receive the vaccine?
Clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines must first show they are safe and effective before any vaccine can be authorized or approved for use. 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). When the FDA authorizes use of a vaccine, this means the vaccine is determined to be safe and effective. The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible. Safety is a top priority while federal partners work to make a coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine(s) available. Following approval or authorization, many vaccine safety monitoring systems watch for adverse events or possible side effects. To find more information on vaccine safety, please click here.

Will the vaccine affect my fertility?
There is NO evidence that the COVID-19 vaccine adversely affects fertility or reproductive health.

If I take the vaccine, can I stop wearing a mask?
NO. Early clinical trials only tracked how many vaccinated people became ill with COVID-19. That leaves open the possibility that some vaccinated people get infected without developing symptoms and could then silently transmit the virus to others. While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it will be important for everyone to continue using all the tools available to us to help stop this pandemic, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often and staying at least 6 feet away from others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following the CDC's recommendations for **how to protect yourself and others** will offer the best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19.

Can I still contract COVID-19 after taking the vaccine?
Early clinical trials only tracked how many vaccinated people became ill with COVID-19. That leaves open the possibility that some vaccinated people get infected without developing symptoms and could then silently transmit the virus to others.

Additionally, it typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination. That means it's possible a person could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination and get sick. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection. We won't know how long immunity produced by vaccination lasts until we have more data on how well it works.

If I had COVID, will the vaccine work on me?
Due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19 and the fact that re-infection with COVID-19 is possible, people may be advised to get a COVID-19 vaccine even if they have been sick with COVID-19 before.

If I get ill from taking this vaccine, who will be responsible?

As people get vaccinated, CDC, FDA, and other federal partners will use the following existing, robust systems and data sources to conduct ongoing safety monitoring. CDC is also implementing a new smartphone-based tool called **v-safe** to check-in on people's health after they receive a COVID-19 vaccine. When you receive your vaccine, you should also receive a **v-safe** information sheet telling you how to enroll in **v-safe**. If you enroll, you will receive regular text messages directing you to surveys where you can report any problems or adverse reactions you have after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. To find more information on vaccine safety, please click here.

What is mRNA?

mRNA vaccines are a new type of vaccine that are relatively quick and inexpensive to make, and potentially safer than traditional vaccines. To trigger an immune response, many vaccines use a weakened or inactivated virus. Instead, mRNA vaccines use a small piece of the genetic code of the virus that teaches our cells how to make a piece of COVID-19 that triggers an immune response inside our bodies.

That immune response produces antibodies which protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies. In other words, mRNA vaccines use a small sequence of RNA from the spike of the COVID virus. This enables our bodies to develop an immune response to the spike. This is enough for our immune system to identify the whole virus and protect us. For more information on mRNA please click here.

What are the differences between vaccines?

The CDC reports that currently there are three main types of COVID-19 vaccines that are undergoing large-scale clinical trials in the United States.

- **mRNA vaccines** contain material from the virus that gives our cells instructions for how to make a harmless piece of COVID-19. Our bodies recognize that the piece should not be there and build an immune response that will remember how to fight the virus that causes COVID-19 if we are infected in the future.
- **Protein subunit vaccines** include harmless pieces of the virus that cause COVID-19 instead of the entire virus. Once vaccinated, our immune system recognizes that the proteins don't belong in the body and builds an immune response. If we are ever infected in the future, our immune system will recognize and fight the virus. (*Continued)*

Vector vaccines contain a weakened version of a live virus—a different virus than the one that causes COVID-19—that has genetic material from the virus that causes COVID-19 inserted in it. Once it is inside our cells, the genetic material gives cells instructions to make a small piece of the COVID-19 virus. This prompts our bodies to build an immune response that will remember how to fight that virus if we are infected in the future.

Phases and timelines (who gets it when)

Once the vaccine is distributed to the general public, who will choose who gets the vaccine next and how will I know when I can get the vaccine?

Vaccination of individuals in Phase 1A is currently ongoing in Howard County and across Maryland. The State of Maryland has prioritized who will receive the vaccine using the below list. When the State and Howard County are preparing to enter a new vaccination phase, there will be broad public communication to ensure those eligible to receive the vaccine know how to register and where to get it.

- Phase 1A includes all licensed, registered, and certified healthcare providers; nursing home residents and staff; law enforcement, and firefighters, EMS, and other first responders; correctional healthcare staff and officers; and front line judiciary staff. (This phase is ongoing.)
- Phase 1B includes those age 75 and older, those in assisted living, independent living, developmental disabilities/behavioral health group homes, and other congregate facilities; high-risk incarcerated individuals; continuity of government vaccinations; and education, including K-12 teachers, support staff, and daycare providers. (Howard County is beginning to enter this phase by first prioritizing residents age 75 and older)
- Phase 1C includes those ages 65-74, and essential workers in lab services, food/agriculture production, manufacturing, the U.S. Postal Service, public transit and grocery stores. (This phase will begin in Howard County as soon as vaccine supply allows)
- Phase 2 includes those ages 16-64 who are at increased risk of COVID-19 illness due to comorbidities, as well as essential workers in critical utilities, transportation, logistics, infrastructure, food services, etc., and incarcerated adults.
- Phase 3 will be a wide-scale distribution of the vaccine associated with broad availability to the general population of the state.

Where can I get a vaccine?
The initial distribution of vaccine will be limited until manufacturing ramps up. During the first phase of limited supply, the Federal government will ship vaccine directly to hospitals, contracted pharmacies and Local Health Departments. State governments make the final decision about how doses should be prioritized.

The Howard County Health Department is currently providing vaccine to healthcare workers, first responders and adults age 75 and older who live or work in Howard County. Those who fall into these categories can visit http://bit.ly/HoCOVIDVaccine for the latest information about vaccine availability and registration. As the supply of vaccine increases, vaccine will become available to more people until all who want vaccine are able to get it.

If I live in Howard County, can I go somewhere else to get vaccine?
Every jurisdiction in Maryland has different procedures for who is eligible to receive vaccine. You should contact each local jurisdiction directly for more information about their policies. In Howard County, we currently require an individual part of an eligible group to live or work in Howard County to receive vaccine.

Will families/households be vaccinated at the same time?
Initially, people will need to register individually for vaccine appointments online.

If I had COVID already, does that mean that I have to wait longer to get vaccine?
No. People who have gotten sick with COVID-19 may still benefit from getting vaccinated. Due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19 and the fact that re-infection with COVID-19 is possible, people may be advised to get a COVID-19 vaccine even if they have been sick with COVID-19 before. At this time, experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. The immunity someone gains from having an infection, called natural immunity, varies from person to person. Some early evidence suggests natural immunity may not last very long.

Will it cost anything to get the vaccine?
According to the CDC, vaccine doses purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars will be given to the American people at no cost. However, vaccination providers will be able to charge an administration fee for giving the shot to someone. Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund.

Is vaccine being wasted in Howard County?
At this time, vaccine waste is not a concern in Howard County. Our team works carefully to ensure that no doses go to waste, and with clinics operating daily or nearly daily, we are keeping our supply moving constantly. In fact, our team is currently staffed to offer more appointments than we have doses - though we hope to keep receiving more as soon as they become available, and are encouraged that our efficiency will keep our supply moving quickly.

Where and how can I receive vaccine in Howard County?
At this time, there is no pre-registration option available for the COVID-19 vaccine. When vaccine becomes more broadly available, anyone who wishes to get the vaccine will have to register on www.Marylandvax.org. To stay up-to-date with the latest information, you can visit the Health Department website: https://bit.ly/HoCOVIDVaccine or sign up for the weekly e-newsletter: https://bit.ly/HoCoHealthENewsletter.