COVID-19 VACCINE QUICK FAQs

Vaccines are becoming available to help protect against COVID-19. Here are a few facts about the vaccines.


What vaccines are available?
The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are the first approved in the United States. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the vaccines under Emergency Use Authorization.

How many people have been vaccinated?
As of January 3, 2021, over 21 million people worldwide have received their first vaccine dose.

How were the vaccines developed?
The vaccines were developed and tested in clinical trials. These trials go through different phases and provide scientific data at each phase to ensure vaccines meet standards for safety and effectiveness. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) used this data to determine if the vaccine should be available for use.

Over 40,000 people participated Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine trials and over 30,000 in the Moderna trials to see how the vaccines offer protection to people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, and medical conditions.

Are the vaccines safe?
The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible.

Scientists have been working since the pandemic began to make a COVID-19 vaccine available as soon as possible. This rapid timeline has raised concerns for some people about safety. The FDA carefully reviews all safety data from the vaccine clinical trials. The FDA authorized emergency use because the expected benefits of the vaccine outweigh potential risks.

The FDA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will continue to monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines, to make sure even very rare side effects are identified.

How do the vaccines work?
The vaccines are messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines. mRNA vaccines do not contain a live virus so a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19.

The mRNA molecule enters your cell near the injection site and teaches your cell how to make a protein that will help your immune system respond, and eventually make antibodies, to COVID-19. The protein is displayed on the cell surface. It causes your immune system to start making antibodies. Antibodies protect you from getting infected if the COVID-19 virus enters your body.

After the piece of the protein is made, your cell breaks down the mRNA strand and disposes of it using enzymes in the cell. The mRNA strand never enters the cell’s nucleus or affects your genetic material.
When I can get a vaccine?
The Virginia Health Department (https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/covid-19-vaccine/) or your local health department will make information available about the current phase and groups able to get the vaccine.

Check the website regularly to keep up to date on this information. Register to get your vaccine when it is available to you.

Do I need to get two doses of the vaccine?
Yes. You will need to get two doses of the same vaccine; the second will be a few weeks from your first dose. The first shot primes your immune system, helping it recognize the virus, and the second shot strengthens your immune response. Two doses provides the best protection against COVID-19.

Why should I get the vaccine?
COVID-19 can cause serious illness or death, though many people may have only mild illness. The vaccine will greatly reduce your chances of getting COVID-19 and will ensure that if you do get COVID-19, you will have mild symptoms or none at all. The vaccine is one more tool to help protect you, your loved ones and community.

I already had COVID-19, should I still get the vaccine?
Yes, once you are out of the active stage of infection. At this time, experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after having COVID-19. Due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19 and the fact that re-infection with COVID-19 may be possible, you benefit from getting the vaccine.

What are the side effects from the vaccine?
Side effects included arm pain at the injection site, tiredness, headache, other body aches, or fever. Side effects generally last a few days. These side effects mean that your body’s immune system is creating antibodies to fight off the virus. Side effects do not mean that the vaccine has given you COVID-19.

You may take an over-the-counter pain reliever (like Tylenol), use a cool cloth on the injection site, and keep hydrated to relieve discomfort. Call your healthcare provider for advice if you have concerns about side effects.

Can the vaccine make me sick with COVID-19?
No. None of the vaccines contain the live virus, so a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19.

After I get the vaccine, do I need to wear a mask, stay physically distant, and wash my hands?
Yes. These actions help prevent spread of illness to others and yourself. The vaccine is one more tool to stop the spread of COVID-19.

We must learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions as there is limited information on how well the vaccine reduces the spread of the virus and how long protection lasts.

Will getting the vaccine cause me to have a positive COVID-19 viral test?
No. Getting a vaccine will not cause you to test positive on COVID-19 PCR and antigen tests. These types of tests detect active infection with the virus that causes COVID-19.

Is there a cost for the vaccine?
There will be no cost for the vaccine. Your local health department will make information available on getting the vaccine when it is available, regardless of health insurance status.