Answers to Your COVID-19 VACCINE Questions

OPEN DOOR HEALTH SERVICES

You can feel confident receiving your COVID-19 vaccine knowing it has undergone rigorous safety testing and trials. We know you may have questions about how the vaccine was developed, how it works, and who can receive it. The following information covers many of the questions we have received from patients. If you have further question, or questions related to your specific situation, don't hesitate to reach out to your provider at (765) 286-7000.

SAFETY

I've heard the vaccine was "fast-tracked." Is the vaccine safe if it was developed quickly?

The safety of COVID-19 vaccines is a top priority. The CDC and Dr. Faucci have been very clear that safety was not compromised by the speed of development.

- The vaccine was tested in clinical trials that included more than 40,000 people of different ages and races, as well as those with different medical conditions.
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) carefully reviewed all safety data from trials and authorized emergency use of the vaccine. Emergency use is only granted when the expected benefits outweigh potential risks. The vaccine has also been reviewed and deemed safe to use by state review panels.
- Dr. Anthony Fauci, a leading expert in the vaccine's developement, has been very clear that "fast-tracking" refers to financial backing of the vaccine's development. The government took on financial risk that normally would have been taken on by private companies. Because of this financial backing from the government, the process was able to move quickly.

Does the vaccine alter my DNA?

No. The COVID-19 vaccines are Messenger RNA vaccines, also called "mRNA" vaccines. These vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response. The mRNA does NOT enter the nucleus of the cell, which is where our DNA is kept. This means mRNA cannot affect or interact with our DNA in any way. Instead, the vaccine works with the body's natural defenses to safely develop immunity to the disease. Learn more about mRNA vaccines.

If mRNA vaccines are new, how do we know they're safe?

Like all vaccines, mRNA vaccines have been rigorously tested for safety before being authorized for use. mRNA technology is new, but not unknown. It has been studied for more than a decade. Learn more about mRNA vaccines.

Can the COVID-19 vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. None of the available COVID-19 vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19, so they cannot make you sick with COVID-19. Any side effects felt after a vaccine do not mean you have COVID-19. If you became infected with the virus just before or just after vaccination, it's possible you would still develop COVID-19. It would not, however, be caused by the vaccine.

Will the vaccine interact with my medications?

The COVID-19 will not interfere with most prescription medications. Some exceptions might include certain steroids, immunosuppressants, or chemotherapy drugs. If you have questions about the vaccine and medications, contact your primary care provider to discuss.

SIDE EFFECTS

What do I do if I have a side effect from the COVID-19 vaccine?

The side effects from COVID-19 vaccination may feel like flu, sometimes including fever. These symptoms are normal and are a sign that the body is building immunity. They typically go away within about 3 days. CDC has developed a new tool, v-safe, as an additional layer of COVID-19 vaccine safety. V-safe is a new smartphone-based, after-vaccination health checker for people who have received the vaccine. Use it to report any side effects. You may also contact your primary health care provider to discuss symptoms. In an emergency, call 911.

Are there long-term side effects?

FDA and CDC continue to monitor safety of the vaccine, to make sure even rare or long-term effects are identified. From the data gathered in trials, as well as information researchers have learned about vaccines over many decades, the FDA believes the benefit to the COVID-19 vaccine outweighs potential risks. The risks of becoming ill with COVID-19 are well known, and the vaccine is an important tool in preventing serious illness.

continued on the back…

PROTECTION

How effective is the vaccine? Am I immediately protected?

The vaccines currently available (made by Pfizer and Moderna) are about 95% effective. They require 2 doses to receive the full benefit of the vaccine. Doses are spaced 3-4 weeks apart, depending on which brand you receive. The full 95% protection is reached about 1-2 weeks after the second dose. This may vary by person. The first dose alone provides a limited amount of protection, but experts emphasize the second dose is very important. If you became infected with the virus just before or just after vaccination, it's possible you would still develop COVID-19. It would not, however, be caused by the vaccine.

How long does immunity from the vaccine last?

Experts are not sure how long immunity from the vaccine lasts. As they learn more, the CDC will keep the public informed.

If I've already had COVID-19, do I need to get vaccinated?

Yes. Re-infection is possible. Current evidence suggests reinfection with the virus that causes COVID-19 is uncommon in the first 90 days after infection. However, the immunity someone gains from having an infection ("natural immunity") varies from person to person. Researchers are working to learn more about how long immunity lasts.

Why do I need two doses?

With the COVID-19 vaccines currently available, two shots are needed to provide the best protection against COVID-19. The shots are given 3-4 weeks apart, depending on the brand you receive. The first shot primes the immune system, helping it recognize the virus. The second shot strengthens the immune response.

Will the vaccine cause me to test positive for COVID-19 on a viral test?

No. Viral tests are used to see if you have a current infection. The vaccine cannot cause infection, and therefore it will not cause you to test positive. (However, there is a possibility you would test positive for anitbodies after vaccination. An antibody test is not a COVID-19 test; rather, an antibody test measures whether or not you have had previous infection. Experts are researching how the vaccine may affect antibody test results.)

Do I still need to mask and social distance after receiving the vaccine?

Yes. Experts believe it may be possible for a vaccinated person to still contract and spread the virus, even though the vaccine helps protect them from becoming sick. Additionally, while the COVID-19 vaccines are very effective, they may not prevent illness in every instance. For these reasons, we must continue to protect ourselves and those around us through masks and distancing.

ELIGIBILITY/SCHEDULING

When will I be eligible to get the vaccine?

The CDC has created recommendations for who will be given priority to receive vaccination. States then develop their own plans based on the recommendations. In Indiana, the initial groups to receive vaccine were healthcare workers, many frontline essential workers, and employees/residents of long-term care facilities. (The long-term care facility vaccine program is being administered through a federal partnership with pharmacies.) Specific age groups then became available. Additional groups will become eligible as more vaccine becomes available. Up-to-date eligibility information is posted at www.OurShot.IN.gov. You can also receive this information by calling 211.

How can I schedule my COVID-19 vaccination?

Eligible individuals can visit www.OurShot.IN.gov or call 211 to schedule. Eligibility information is available on the site and at 211. For residents of long-term care facilities, a federal partnership with select pharmacies will provide vaccination on-site at the facility. Each facility will alert residents when the vaccine is available to them. However, if the resident is able to leave the facility, they are also eligible to schedule a vaccination through OurShot.IN.gov or 211.

Do I have to pay for the vaccine?

No. The vaccine is no cost to you. Insurance may be billed when available.

Can children receive the vaccine?

The first two available vaccines are made by Pfizer and Moderna. The Pfizer vaccine is currently approved by the FDA for ages 16 and older. Moderna's is currently approved by the FDA for ages 18 and older. Even as general eligibility opens up more broadly, vaccines can only be given to age groups for which the vaccine is approved by the FDA. (This information may change. Please check www.CDC.gov for updates.)

This information was accurate as of January 11, 2021. Because COVID-19 vaccine information continues to evolve, please visit www.cdc.gov for the most recent updates, or contact your primary care provider. **Sources:** www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/answering-questions.html, www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html, www.cdc.gov, www.OurShot.IN.gov