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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: COVID-19 VACCINES

Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

The benefits of preventing a COVID-19 infection outweigh any risks of the vaccine. The vaccine helps protect you from getting COVID-19 and is considered a safe way to build protection against the disease. COVID-19 can have serious, life-threatening complications, and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you or your loved ones. If you still get infected, the vaccine may prevent serious illness and death. By getting vaccinated, you are helping to protect yourself, your family and friends.

Does the COVID-19 vaccine protect against the Delta and Omicron variants?

Currently, all COVID-19 vaccines authorized in the U.S. have proven to be highly effective against COVID-19, preventing severe disease, hospitalization, and death. Data show that the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna) also provide protection against variants of the virus, including the Delta and Omicron strains. While there is lower vaccine effectiveness against infection and symptomatic disease caused by the Omicron-variant, the breakthrough infections occurring in those with up-to-date vaccination are associated with fewer hospitalizations and deaths.

Which vaccine should I take?

Vaccines currently available in the U.S. are Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson/Janssen. All have passed the same rigorous review process and are highly effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19. Generally, mRNA vaccines are recommended as a first option due to their excellent safety profiles and effectiveness. The Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine should be reserved for individuals who are unable to take an mRNA vaccine due to medical contraindications or local supply constraints. If you have concerns about your medical condition(s) and receiving the vaccine, consult with your doctor.

For the two-dose vaccines, when do I get the second dose?

The timing between your initial and second vaccine dose depends on which vaccine you received. If you receiveded either Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna, you should have received your second dose near the recommended 3-week or 1-month interval when possible. If for some reason you did not get the second dose at 3-4 weeks after the first, then it is recommended that you get the second dose at the earliest opportunity to do so. You should not receive the second dose earlier than the recommended interval. The second dose of an mRNA vaccine may be given at no less than 3 weeks (for Pfizer-BioNTech) or 4 weeks (Moderna). An 8-week interval may be optimal for some people ages 12 years and older, especially for males ages 12 to 39 years. This information does not apply to the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine. See below for additional information on booster dose(s).

Will I need a booster dose?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommends that individuals who are 5 years and older who received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna two-dose COVID-19 vaccine receive a booster dose at least 5 months after completion of their primary vaccine series. Eligible individuals may choose which vaccine they receive as a booster dose. CDC allows for a booster dose that is not the same type as the initial vaccination(s).

Do I need to receive a fourth dose?

CDC recommends that adults ages 50 and older receive a second booster with either mRNA vaccine at least 4 months after their first booster, regardless of what type of first booster they received. Individuals who are moderately to severely immunocompromised should receive a fourth dose at least 3 months after their third dose, followed by a fifth dose at least 4 months later. Eligible individuals may choose which mRNA vaccine they receive as the final two booster doses. CDC allows for a booster shot that is not the same type as the initial vaccination(s).

In those who are vaccinated with two-doses and have a breathrough infection, what is the timing of receiving the third (booster) dose?

For people under age 50, a fourth dose is only recommended for those who are immunocompromised. Individuals who are immunocompromised should receive their third dose 28 days after their second dose and return 3 months later to receive their fourth dose. According to CDC, you should receive your booster dose when you have recovered from the acute illness (if symptoms were present) and after you have completed your isolation period. Individuals who recently had COVID-19 may consider delaying their next vaccine dose (primary dose or booster) by 3 months from when their symptoms started or, if they had no symptoms, when they first received a positive test. Reinfection is less likely in the weeks to months after infection. However, certain factors, such as personal risk of severe disease, local COVID-19 community level, and the most common COVID-19 variant currently causing illness, could be reasons to get a vaccine sooner rather than later. Consult with your physician if you have any questions about the timing of your third (booster) dose.

Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. None of the COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the U.S. contain the live virus that causes COVID-19.

Will I test positive once I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

No. Viral tests such as PCR used to diagnose COVID-19 check samples from the respiratory system for the presence of the virus that causes COVID-19. Since the vaccines do not contain the live virus, they will not affect your PCR test result. However, it typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination. Therefore, it is possible to test positive if you were infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination. It is possible you may test positive on some antibody tests if your body develops an immune response. Positive antibody tests can indicate you had a previous infection or vaccination and that you may have some level of protection against the virus.

Should I get vaccinated if I already had COVID-19?

Yes. Experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Even if you have already recovered from COVID-19, it is possible that you could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 again. Receiving the vaccine when you have already had COVID-19 significantly enhances your immune protection and further reduces your risk of reinfection. However, according to CDC, you should not receive the vaccine until you have recovered from the acute illness (if symptoms were present) and after you have completed your isolation period. Individuals who recently had COVID-19 may consider delaying their next vaccine dose (primary dose or booster) by 3 months from when their symptoms started or, if they had no

symptoms, when they first received a positive test. Reinfection is less likely in the weeks to months after infection. However, certain factors, such as personal risk of severe disease, local COVID-19 community level, and the most common COVID-19 variant currently causing illness, could be reasons to get a vaccine sooner rather than later. Consult with your physician if you have any questions about the timing of your vaccine.

If I am pregnant, can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. There is currently no evidence that antibodies formed from COVID-19 vaccination cause any problem with pregnancy, including development of the placenta. People trying to become pregnant now or planinf to try later may receive the COVID-19 vaccine. There is no evidence that fertility problems are a side effect of any of the COVID-19 vaccines. See ACOG's practice advisory (https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/practice-advisory/articles/2020/12/covid-19-vaccination-considerations-for-obstetric-gynecologic-care) and CDC recommendations on COVID vaccination for pregnant women (https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s0811-vaccine-safe-pregnant.html). CDC has also established the v-safe COVID-19 Vaccine Pregnancy Registry to learn more (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/vsafepregnancyregistry.html).

Are there any side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. As with many vaccines, there may be mild side effects (pain/swelling in the arm you received the shot, fever, chills, fatigue, and headache). Side effects should only last a few days. It is important that you return for your second dose (if receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine), even if the first dose caused mild side effects. Rarely do more severe side effects occur. Use your smartphone to tell CDC how you or your dependent feel after getting any dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Your participation in v-safe helps them monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines for everyone (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/vsafe.html). There are rare side effects that have occurred, but currently, there are no common, severe side effects that have been reported despite millions of vaccine administrations.

If I have side effects from COVID-19 vaccination, can I return to my workplace?

You should be able to return to your workplace after receiving the vaccine. Most people who get the vaccine have mild or no side effects. For those who have side effects, they may uncommonly affect your ability to do some daily activities. If you experience a fever after vaccination, you may need to stay home from work and may need further evaluation.

Are there long-term side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

It will take more time to learn about very rare or possible long-term side effects. But, safety data have been collected for months for all authorized vaccines. It's unusual for vaccine side effects to appear more than 8 weeks after vaccination. Vaccines do not generally have long-term side effects and there is no reason to believe COVID-19 vaccines will be an exception. Systems are in place at CDC to monitor for safety issues across the country.

Should I take Tylenol or Motrin before my vaccine dose?

Talk to a doctor about taking over-the-counter medicine, such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, aspirin (only for people ages 18 years or older), or antihistamines for any pain and discomfort experienced after getting vaccinated (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/expect/after.html).

How much will it cost for me to get the vaccine?

The federal government provides the vaccine free of charge to ALL people living in the US whether or not they are citizens. Providers can be reimbursed for vaccine administration by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund. No one can be denied a vaccine if they are unable to pay the vaccine administration fee.

Will I receive documentation of my vaccine/a vaccine card?

When you receive your COVID-19 vaccination, you will be given a vaccine card as documentation. The card will contain your name, birthdate, vaccine manufacturer, and lot number, as well as where the vaccine was administered and date the vaccine was given to you. It is important to keep your COVID-19 vaccination card as it may serve several important purposes in the future. It is recommended to take a cell phone picture of it or if you do not take a cell phone photo, it is recommended you scan the card. Consider making at least one photocopy. Be sure to keep the original in a safe place. There are various apps available for COVID-19 vaccination tracking.

Will I be required to get vaccinated for work?

It depends. COVID-19 vaccines are currently required for health care workers in facilities that receive Medicare and Medicaid funding. For those workers, weekly testing no longer qualifies as a substitute for vaccination. Check with your employer to see if they have any rules that apply to you.

Is the vaccine safe since it was developed so quickly?

Yes. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves a vaccine only if there are enough data to suggest that it is safe and effective; this is after clinical trials have been conducted with thousands of people of various ages, races, and ethnicities and when the benefits outweigh risks. Every study and every phase of every trial was carefully reviewed and approved by a safety board and FDA. The process was transparent and rigorous, with continual oversight and expert approval.

FDA granted full approval for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for individuals aged 16 years and older (8/23/21) and full approval for the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine for individuals aged 18 years and older (1/31/22). For full approval of a new drug or vaccine, the FDA requires extensive data on safety and effectiveness, inspection of manufacturing facilities, and a comprehensive review of all clinical and "real-world" use. These approvals should provide additional confidence that the vaccines work and are safe.

FDA will continue to monitor and oversee vaccine production to ensure all safety protocols are followed. FDA and CDC also collect and analyze information from reports of any side effects that may occur after a vaccine has been licensed. CDC developed a smartphone-based tool, v-safe, to identify any safety issues with COVID-19 vaccines. Register for v-safe after you are vaccinated.

How long will vaccine immunity last?

As this is a relatively new virus with new vaccines to combat it, length of immunity after developing COVID-19 or getting the vaccine is unknown. Studies are ongoing and experts are working to learn more about natural and vaccine-induced immunity. Research shows that FDA-authorized or approved vaccines are effective at preventing COVID-19. Getting COVID-19 also provides infection-induced immunity. Length of protection is unclear for either vaccination or infection-induced immunity, although there is consistent evidence suggesting immunity may decline with time. At this time, everyone 5 years and older is recommended to get a booster. Individuals who have had 2 shots of Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna may receive a COVID-19 booster 5 months after their 2nd dose.

If the vaccine is effective, why are there reports of infections/death among those vaccinated?

No vaccine is 100% effective against preventing infection. But, we know the COVID-19 vaccine is highly effective against infection, and even more effective against serious illness, hospitalizations, and deaths. Severe outcomes and deaths are increasingly only experienced in unvaccinated and/or severly immunocompromised individuals.

Do I still need to wear a mask after receiving the vaccine?

Individuals with up-to-date vaccination may voluntarily participate in activities that they participated in prior to the pandemic, but for some of these activities, masking may be required based on employer/institutions policies or state and local ordinances.

For additional questions, consult with your health care provider.

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