

10 Questions About the COVID-19 Vaccine and What to Expect When You Get Vaccinated

The COVID-19 vaccines are here. What does that mean to you?

Our Q&A, based on information directly from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, will help clear up some of your questions about the vaccine and what to expect when it's your turn to get vaccinated.

1. **Why do I need a COVID-19 vaccine?**

To stop this pandemic, we need to use all of our prevention tools. Vaccines are one of the most protective tools to protect your health and prevent the spread of disease. Studies show that COVID-19 vaccines are very effective at keeping you from getting COVID-19. Experts also think that getting a COVID-19 vaccine may help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19. These vaccines cannot give you the disease itself.

2. **How does a vaccine work?**

A vaccine stimulates your immune system to produce antibodies exactly like it would if you were exposed to the disease. After getting vaccinated, you develop immunity to that disease without having to get the disease first. The goal for these vaccines is to teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19.

This is what makes vaccines such powerful medicine. Unlike most medicines, which treat or cure diseases, vaccines prevent them.

3. **Is the vaccine safe?**

According to the FDA, vaccine safety is its top priority. These vaccines were tested and approved using the FDA's rigorous expedited evaluation process. The emergency use process has been followed for authorization of the COVID-19 vaccines as with other vaccines.

4. **When is the COVID-19 vaccination available to me?**

Because the supply of COVID-19 vaccine in the United States is expected to be limited at first, CDC is providing recommendations to federal, state and local governments about who should be vaccinated first. As vaccine supply increases but remains limited, the CDC will expand the groups recommended for vaccination. In the weeks and months to come, the goal is that everyone will be able to easily get vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as large enough quantities are available.

5. **How many shots of COVID-19 vaccine are needed?**

The two vaccines that are currently approved to prevent COVID-19 in the United States both need two shots to be fully effective.

6. **Are there side effects from getting the COVID-19 vaccine?**

The side effects from COVID-19 vaccination may feel like flu symptoms (sore muscles, feeling tired or mild fever) and might even affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days.

7. **What happens after I get my first COVID-19 vaccine dose?**

You should receive a vaccination card or printout that tells you what COVID-19 vaccine you received, the date you received it and where you received it. Your healthcare provider also should give you a v-safe information sheet. This sheet provides instructions on how to register and use v-safe, a free smartphone-based tool that uses text messaging and web surveys to provide personalized health check-ins after you receive a COVID-19 vaccination. And v-safe will also remind you to get your second COVID-19 vaccine dose.

8. **After I get the vaccine, do I still need to wear a mask?**

Yes, you will need to keep wearing a mask that covers your nose and mouth, washing your hands often and staying at least 6 feet away from other people you do not live with. This gives you and others the best protection from catching the virus.

Right now, experts don't know how long the vaccine will protect you, so it's a good idea to continue following the guidelines from CDC and your health department. We also know not everyone will be able to get vaccinated right away, so it's still important to protect yourself and others.

9. **Will I have to pay to get the COVID-19 vaccination?**

No, cost is not an obstacle to getting vaccinated against COVID-19. The vaccine administration fee is covered by government or private health insurance plans with no patient contribution. For individuals without insurance, the vaccine will also be provided at no cost.

10. **If I have already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get the vaccine?**

COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to you regardless of whether you already had COVID-19 infection. You should not be required to have an antibody test before you are vaccinated.

11. However, anyone currently infected with COVID-19 should wait to get vaccinated until after their illness has resolved and after they have met the criteria to discontinue isolation.

Additionally, current evidence suggests that reinfection with the virus that causes COVID-19 is uncommon within the 90 days after initial infection. Therefore, people with a recent infection may delay vaccination until the end of that 90-day period, if desired.

Sources:

HHRH, January 2021; Centers for Disease Control, January 2021