



Itasca County Public Health

COVID Vaccine – Frequently Asked Questions

As of Feb. 12, 2021

Why should I be getting a COVID vaccine?

Stopping a pandemic requires all of us to do our part. For months, you have helped prevent the spread of COVID-19 by taking steps like wearing a mask, washing your hands, staying at least six feet from others and remaining home if you are sick. Getting vaccinated is another step you can take to reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus and spreading it to others. Getting vaccinated, along with continuing to follow the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from COVID-19.

I am young, healthy and at low risk from COVID. Should I still get vaccinated?

Yes. The more people who get the vaccine, the closer we can get to reaching herd immunity. Herd immunity is when most people are immune to a disease (meaning they can't get it) because they got a vaccine or they already had the disease and cannot get it again, at least for a while. Herd immunity can stop or slow the spread of disease.

How do mRNA vaccines work?

mRNA is a blueprint our bodies use to make proteins. It stands for messenger RNA. mRNA vaccines use a process that introduces instructions on a form of the COVID-19 protein. Your immune system then stimulates your cells to make antibodies that will protect you in the future. You cannot get infected from a COVID-19 vaccine, it is just the mRNA instructions that your body reacts to.

What are the side effects of the mRNA vaccine?

Side effects from both mRNA vaccines are caused as part of the immune response to the vaccines. Side effects occurred during the first week after vaccination but were most likely one or two days after the vaccine was administered. Side effects were more frequent following the second dose. The most common side effects reported were fatigue, headache, and muscle ache.

Will this vaccine make me sick or give me COVID?

The vaccine will not (and cannot) give you COVID. The most common reactions to this vaccine are injection site symptoms like soreness, redness, or swelling, or body symptoms such as chills, tiredness, or headache. These symptoms are mostly caused by your immune system responding to the vaccine, which is a good thing. Symptoms, especially soreness at the injection site for a day, are common, but the vast majority of them are mild.

What are the ingredients in the vaccine?

The ingredients are simple:

- mRNA
- Lipids - these are molecules that do not break down in water and can be thought of as little bubbles of fat that surround the mRNA like a protective shield.
- Salts and amines - these are used to keep the pH of the vaccine similar to that of the body so that the vaccine does not damage cells.
- Sugar - this is the same sugar you find in your food and is used to keep the lipids or fat bubbles from sticking to each other or to the vaccine vial.

These are the only ingredients in both mRNA vaccines.

Does the vaccine use aborted fetal tissue to make it?

There is no aborted fetal tissue in the vaccine. Cells from fetal tissue from medical abortions were used in the development of the vaccines and have been used to develop vaccines and medications since the 1960s. If it matters to you for religious or personal reasons, the Vatican and Pope Francis have issued a statement that it's "morally acceptable" to receive a vaccination for COVID-19, even if the vaccine's research or production involved using cell lines derived from aborted fetuses, given the "grave danger" of the pandemic.

Can mRNA vaccines change a person's DNA?

Since mRNA is active only in a cell's cytoplasm and DNA is located in the nucleus, they do not affect each other. mRNA never enters the nucleus where the DNA is located so it can't alter DNA. Also, mRNA only remains in the cell cytoplasm for a limited time.

If you had the virus, will you still need to get the vaccine?

People who had COVID-19 are recommended to get the vaccine after they have recovered. We do not know how long antibodies last after infection and a small number of people have had more severe second bouts of infection. The vaccine trials included people who were previously infected with SARS-CoV-2, and the vaccine was found to be safe.

Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I am trying to get pregnant?

Yes, women who are trying to get pregnant can get the vaccine. Likewise, if a woman finds out she is pregnant after getting the first dose, but before getting the second dose, she can still get the second dose on time, but should speak with a healthcare provider.

Can pregnant women get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Pregnant women were not included in the early COVID-19 vaccine studies, but some participants were either pregnant and did not know it or became pregnant during the course of the study. As a result, we only have a small amount of data regarding the safety of these vaccines in pregnant women. The good news is that in this small group of women, no concerns were found. However, you should still speak with your healthcare provider before getting a vaccine.

Does the mRNA vaccine cause fertility issues?

Infertility has not been found to be an issue in women infected with COVID-19, so it would not be expected to be a concern for the vaccine. Concerns about antibodies generated by the COVID-19 vaccine attacking syncytin-1, a protein associated with the placenta during pregnancy, are unfounded.

Can those with suppressed immune systems be vaccinated?

If you are immunosuppressed, you should absolutely get the vaccine so that you have a lower chance of getting severely ill from COVID! You may not have as robust of a response to the vaccine as someone with an intact immune system, but some response is still much better than no response. This includes people on chemotherapy and those that have had bone marrow transplants.

Can children get the COVID vaccine?

The Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is available to people age 16 and older. The Moderna vaccine is only approved for those age 18 and older. While several companies have begun enrolling younger children in COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials, no vaccine is currently approved for anyone under age 16.

How do we know the COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

Given that COVID-19 vaccines were made more quickly than other vaccines, it is understandable to be concerned about their safety, but the following can provide reassurances:

Phase III trials for COVID-19 vaccines have been as large as those for other vaccines, including tens of thousands of participants. While these trials may not uncover rare adverse events (that occur in the millions), we can be comfortable that these trials were large enough to detect any major safety concerns.

For each new vaccine, the data from these large phase III vaccine trials undergo several rounds of review by different, independent groups of experts in immunology, statistics, infectious diseases, virology, and vaccinology.

Once the company submits the data to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), an advisory committee of independent experts, called the Vaccine and Related Biologics Product Approval Committee (VRBPAC) reviews the data to evaluate vaccine safety and effectiveness. This committee provides advice to the FDA before a vaccine can be accepted.

Do I still need to wear a mask if I received the vaccine?

94-95% is excellent protection for a vaccine, but it's not complete protection. About 1 in 20 people will still be vulnerable to infection even if immunized. There will also be people who refuse to get the vaccine, and they can still become infected and infect you if you are one of the people who is not protected. It is also still unknown if the vaccines prevent asymptomatic carriage—where people without symptoms carry the virus and infect others.

What should I know before getting my vaccination?

If you have Allergies:

- 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 (including polyethylene glycol [PEG])*
 - Immediate allergic reaction of any severity to polysorbate (due to potential cross-reactive hypersensitivity with the vaccine ingredient PEG)*

* These persons should not receive mRNA COVID-19 vaccination at this time unless they have been evaluated by an allergist-immunologist and it is determined that the person can safely receive the vaccine.

(Ingredients: mRNA, lipids ((4-hydroxybutyl)azanediyl)bis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis(2-hexyldecanoate), 2 [(polyethylene glycol)-2000]-N,N-ditetradecylacetamide, 1,2-Distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine, and cholesterol), potassium chloride, monobasic potassium phosphate, sodium chloride, dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate, and sucrose.)

Post vaccination monitoring:

- There will be a 15-minute observation period for those vaccinated (any non-severe allergy history or no allergies)
- For those with history of severe allergic reaction such as anaphylaxis from any source or an immediate reaction to other vaccines or injectable therapies, the observation period should be 30 minutes.

These patients should discuss with their providers to weigh personal risks/benefits:

- Patients who are pregnant or lactating/breastfeeding
- Patients who are immunocompromised (Due to any cause, such as immunosuppressive medications, HIV/AIDS or other immunocompromising conditions)
- Patients with a history of anaphylaxis to vaccines or injectable medications
- Patients with a history of immediate allergic reactions to vaccines, injectable medications or any ingredient of the vaccine (including polyethylene glycol and polysorbate).

Delay vaccination:

- Patients who have received antibody therapy (mAbs or convalescent plasma): Should defer for 90 days.
- Known exposure to SARS-CoV-2: Defer until quarantine period has ended to avoid exposing others during vaccination visit.
- It is recommended to separate the COVID-19 vaccine from any other vaccine administration by 14 days.

Do I have to pay to be vaccinated?

Under the Cares Act, your COVID-19 vaccination will be at no cost to you, even if you're uninsured. If you are insured, an administration fee may be billed to your insurance by vaccinators.

How long before a coronavirus vaccine takes effect?

Early studies show some benefit of the first dose about 10 days after it is administered and strong effectiveness one week after receiving the second dose of a vaccine.

Will booster or yearly vaccinations be needed?

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines both require two doses, Pfizer 21 days apart and Moderna 28 days apart. You need both doses to be considered fully vaccinated. We do not yet know about other needs for re-vaccination.

One to two weeks after the second dose, both vaccines were found to be more than 94 percent effective, which is the best possible immune response. We do not know what to expect in the next six months to two years. There will likely be fading immunity, but we do not yet know if additional doses of the vaccine will be necessary.

Information Sources:

Bigfork Valley, Dr. Eric Scrivner: <https://www.bigforkvalley.org/covid-19-vaccine/>

Essentia Health: <https://www.essentiahealth.org/covid-19/covid-19-vaccine-information/>

Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital: <https://www.granditasca.org/News-and-Events/Latest-News/COVID-19-Vaccinations>

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia: <http://www.chop.edu/centers-programs/vaccine-education-center>