



COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

A safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is a critical component of the U.S. strategy to reduce COVID-19-related illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths.

Easy access to COVID-19 vaccines is equally important. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working with public health departments, health care providers, and other partners to make sure people can easily get a COVID-19 vaccine and that cost is not a barrier.

The Illinois Department of Public Health is working to ensure that vaccines are delivered and available in accordance with the CDC guidelines and recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

When can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Initial supplies of the vaccine will be limited, and therefore allocated to health care personnel and long-term care (LTC) residents and staff. However, the vaccine supply will increase over time and all adults should be able to be vaccinated in 2021.

Different COVID-19 vaccines are expected to be available. Which vaccine should I take?

Any COVID-19 vaccine authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is expected to be effective. Data available at this point would suggest that the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are very similar in their abilities to produce immunity to the virus. The recommendation would be to take whatever vaccine is made available to you and be sure to receive the booster shot of that same vaccine at the appropriate time. If you choose not to get a second dose, you may reduce the effectiveness of the vaccine.

Do I need a vaccine if I have already had COVID-19?

Yes, people who have already had COVID-19 should plan to take the COVID-19 vaccine, because the science is currently inconclusive as to whether you will be naturally protected from a second COVID-19 infection in the future. The CDC currently suggests that if you were infected with COVID-19 during the previous 90 days, it is likely that you still have immune protection and that you will be asked to wait to receive your vaccine to allow others to be vaccinated first.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

The U.S. vaccine safety system is a deliberate and multi-phase process to ensure all vaccines are as safe as possible. Safety is a top priority. Vaccine candidates conduct clinical trials with many thousands of study participants to generate scientific data and other information for the FDA to determine their safety and effectiveness.

If the FDA determines a vaccine meets its safety and effectiveness standards, it can make these vaccines available for use in the U.S. by approval or Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). After the FDA makes its determination, ACIP will review the available data in order to make vaccine recommendations to the CDC. ACIP will then recommend vaccine use. After a vaccine is authorized or approved for use, vaccine safety monitoring systems will watch for adverse events (possible side effects). CDC is working to expand safety surveillance through new systems and additional information sources, as well as enhancing existing safety monitoring systems.

How was the COVID-19 vaccine studied?

Each authorized COVID-19 vaccine has been studied in large trials of over 30,000 volunteers and shown to be highly effective in preventing COVID-19 disease. The trials involved people of different ages, sex, race/ethnicity, weight, and medical conditions.

Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems were excluded from the COVID-19 vaccine trials, and so the currently available studies do not provide direct information about vaccine safety and effectiveness in these groups of people. The CDC recommends that those who are pregnant consult with their doctor before taking the vaccine.

How can the COVID-19 vaccine be safe and thoroughly tested so quickly?

Many things helped this vaccine get developed so rapidly. Significant resources were invested to fund the basic research and clinical trials, accelerating timelines greatly. Joining existing trial sites instead of developing new sites was a time saver. The virus has a good vaccination target and relatively low mutation rate. Additionally, the amount of infection in the communities allowed scientists to quickly compare vaccinated to unvaccinated populations and conclusively shows the vaccine worked. There were also a huge number of brave volunteers willing to try the “novel” vaccines during the clinical trials.

Can the COVID-19 vaccine cause me to become infected with COVID-19 or infect others?

No, you cannot become infected or infect others from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. None of the early COVID-19 vaccines tested in the U.S. use a live virus that causes COVID-19. The goal for each vaccine is to teach our immune systems how to recognize and to fight the virus that causes COVID-19. The vaccine directs your body to produce a protein that teaches your body how to fight off the virus. At this time, the vaccines that have received approval are mRNA - messenger ribonucleic acid - vaccines. Like other vaccines, mRNA vaccines work by training the immune system to recognize a virus threat and begin producing antibodies to protect itself.

How does the vaccine cause my body to be protected from COVID-19?

Your immune system makes antibodies to fight infections. The COVID-19 vaccine causes your body to make antibodies that target the COVID-19 virus. In the event that your body is exposed to the actual COVID-19 virus, the new antibodies prevent infection.

How long will it take for the COVID-19 vaccine to take effect in my body?

The COVID-19 vaccine is expected to provide some protection a couple of weeks after your first shot and reaches its greatest effectiveness after your second shot. It is very important to take the second shot within the recommended time period for maximum vaccine effectiveness.

Could I contract COVID-19 between my first and second doses of the vaccine?

Although the first dose of vaccine offers some immunity, you will still be considered susceptible to COVID-19. The first dose of the vaccine will provide some protection, but the recommendation is to receive two doses to be protected as intended. Pfizer and Moderna have indicated their vaccines are approximately 95% effective.

How long will the vaccine protect me from COVID-19?

We are still learning about length of immunity. To determine how long protection lasts, follow-up studies are required to detect levels of both types of immune responses – antibody and Tcell – as well as any repeated exposure risks. As more information becomes available, more information will be shared on the length of immunity.

Can children get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Currently, a pediatric vaccine is not available, and it may be some time before one is approved and becomes available. Clinical trials need to be conducted with children before determining if the existing COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for them.

I have allergies, is this vaccine safe for me?

While serious allergic reactions were not seen in vaccine clinical trials of thousands of patients, rare allergic reactions to vaccines are possible. If you have a history of serious allergic reactions, you should discuss your situation with your healthcare provider. The COVID-19 vaccine does not contain any animal products such as eggs.

What are the side effects of this vaccine?

Some people may experience side effects, which are a part of the normal immune response to a vaccine. The majority of the side effects, while not seen in every individual, are signs that your body is recognizing the vaccine and mounting an immune response. Based on prior studies, side effects may include pain, redness and swelling at the site of the injection., fatigue, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, fever, nausea, malaise, and swollen lymph nodes. These symptoms may occur within 2 days after the shot and last 1 to 2 days. Side effects may be more frequent after the 2nd shot (booster) and less frequent among older adults.

Long-term side effects are unknown, although most vaccines do not have long-term side effects. Vaccine studies are ongoing and will continue to monitor and watch for adverse events.

If I get the vaccine, can I stop wearing a mask?

No. While the COVID-19 vaccine is highly effective, it not 100% effective. Until the COVID-19 pandemic is controlled, people who receive the vaccine need to continue following Illinois Department of Public Health guidance such as the use of facemasks, social distancing, and regular hand washing. This protects you as well as your family and community.

For more information on COVID-19 vaccines visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>.