

COVID-19 Vaccination Info Session & Frequently Asked Questions

Karina Dussinger, CRNP

12/9/2020

The COVID-19 vaccine is a genetically engineered vaccine, which means there is not a live virus in it like vaccines in the past. Instead, the vaccine contains a genetic material that gives instructions to your body to recognize and respond to the proteins produced by disease-causing organisms.

Because there is not a live virus in this vaccine, it is much safer for those who are older and/or immunocompromised. The only group that is unsuited for the vaccine are those under 12 years old, because this age group has not been studied.

The technology used to create the COVID-19 vaccine is nothing new. This vaccine development began 20 years ago with the introduction of the SARS and MERS viruses. SARS and MERS were not as deadly as the current COVID-19 virus, which is why this vaccine is moving more quickly through development than in years prior.

Typically, new vaccines are trialed on roughly 3,000 participants. These COVID-19 vaccines have been trialed on approximately 50,000 participants.

The vaccines are proving to be over 90 percent effective, compared to the flu vaccine that is only 40 percent effective. The flu vaccine changes every year, whereas the COVID-19 virus is not shown to mutate. This makes the virus causing COVID-19 easier to vaccinate against.

There may be typical vaccine side effects such as redness, swelling, and/or cold-like symptoms. These side effects should only last for a short time. The side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are not worse than those following the shingles vaccine. Many participants do not experience any side effects.

Most COVID-19 vaccines require a first and second shot that are given three weeks apart. The highest level of protection will not be achieved until after the second shot is administered (see question and answer six below).

While it is uncertain if the vaccine will have lasting side effects, it is also uncertain what the lasting side effects and complications from COVID-19 may be (see question and answer five below).

Healthcare workers and Nursing Home residents will be the first to be offered the vaccine. It is expected to become available to Fairmount by the end of December (see question and answer nine below).

The cost of the COVID-19 vaccine will be free initially and is proving to be a safe and good option to protect you and your loved ones. It will take some time to vaccinate the community as well as achieve an overall level of immunity, but this may be the first step to returning to a pre-pandemic lifestyle.

Frequently Asked Questions

Wellspan Health

Q1) When will vaccines be available?

A1) Pfizer and Moderna have asked the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for emergency use authorization and could be ready for dispensing vaccines in December 2020.

Q2) Are the vaccines safe?

A2) The vaccines have been tested through rigorous scientific and federal regulatory processes to ensure its safety and effectiveness.

Q3) Are the vaccines effective?

A3) Pfizer and Moderna have COVID-19 vaccines that proved to be more than 90 percent effective in clinical trials.

Q4) Are the vaccines from the live virus?

A4) None of the COVID-19 vaccines currently in development in the United States use the live virus that causes COVID-19. There are several different types of vaccines in development. However, the goal for each of them is to teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19.

Q5) What are the side effects from the vaccine?

A5) Most people do not have serious problems after being vaccinated. However, your arm may be sore, red, or warm to the touch. These symptoms usually go away on their own within a week. Some people report getting a headache or fever when getting a vaccine. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is doing exactly what it is supposed to do. It is working and building up protection to disease.

COVID-19 vaccines are being tested in large clinical trials to assess their safety. However, it does take time, and more people getting vaccinated before we learn about very rare or long-term side effects. That is why safety monitoring will continue. The CDC has an independent group of experts that reviews all the safety data as it becomes available and provides regular safety updates. If a safety issue is detected, immediate action will be taken to determine if the issue is related to the COVID-19 vaccine and to determine the best course of action.

Q6) How many doses of the vaccine will be required?

A6) All but one of the COVID-19 vaccines that are currently in the final phases of clinical trials in the United States use two doses. The first shot starts building protection. A second shot a few weeks later is needed to get the most protection the vaccine has to offer. One vaccine in Phase 3 clinical trials only needs one shot.

Q7) How long will the COVID-19 vaccine last? Is a booster or recurring vaccination needed?

A7) We won't know how long immunity produced by vaccination lasts until we have an approved vaccine and have more data on how well it works.

Q8) If someone tested positive for COVID-19, do they need to be vaccinated?

A8) People who have gotten sick with COVID-19 may still benefit from getting vaccinated. Due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19 and the fact that re-infection with COVID-19 is possible, people may be advised to get a COVID-19 vaccine even if they have previously been infected with COVID-19.

At this time, experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. The immunity someone gains from having an infection, called natural immunity, varies from person to person. Some early evidence suggests natural immunity may not last very long.

We won't know how long immunity produced by vaccination lasts until we have a vaccine and more data on how well it works.

Both natural immunity and vaccine-induced immunity are important aspects of COVID-19 that experts are trying to learn more about, and organizations such as the CDC will keep the public informed as new evidence becomes available.

Q9) Who will get the vaccinations first? When will the general public be able to receive vaccinations?

A9) The State of Pennsylvania released its interim Vaccination Plan, which consists of three phases.

Phase one, expected to begin in December, includes critical populations due to the limited vaccine supply: health care personnel, EMS first responders, critical workers maintaining core functions, essential workers, people 65 and older, and residents in congregate care settings.