Patient Education

Get Vaccinated Against COVID-19
All About the COVID-19 Vaccine

Health care providers recommend most people get vaccinated against COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccines are effective, safe and crucial to stop the spread of the virus. Get vaccinated to help yourself, your family, your community and those who are not able to get the vaccine.

A COVID-19 vaccine is now available to most people in the United States. This resource is meant to help you learn about the vaccine as well as about extra and booster doses.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers have tested several vaccines under strict guidelines. While it may seem to some people that the vaccine was developed quickly, the vaccine was actually developed over a long time based on years of research used for other virus vaccines. This earlier research made it possible to create the COVID-19 vaccine in a shorter time than usual.

Why get vaccinated?

Vaccines help build the body’s ability to fight off a virus. Examples are the influenza vaccine, the chickenpox vaccine and many others.

A vaccine may not keep you from getting COVID-19. However, if you do get the illness, the vaccine may keep you from becoming seriously ill. It may also keep you from developing complications due to the illness. That may be a lifesaving benefit of the vaccine.

The FDA has said the vaccines for COVID-19 are safe and effective. How effective the vaccines are varies by type of vaccine you receive, your age and overall health as well as other factors. Talk to your health care provider if you have questions.
Who should get vaccinated?

All people 12 years and older should get vaccinated unless their health care provider tells them otherwise. Options for vaccines include:

- The two-dose Pfizer BioNTech vaccine if you are 12 years and older. You can get these two doses 21 days apart.
- The two-dose Moderna vaccine if you are 18 years and older. You get these two doses 28 days apart.
- The one-dose Johnson & Johnson Janssen vaccine if you are 18 years and older.

Who should get an extra dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and why?

All people who have weakened immune systems, called being immunocompromised, should get an extra dose. You may also hear this called a third dose.

People who have weakened immune systems may not have responded as well as needed to protect them from COVID-19 after receiving the vaccine. The extra dose of the vaccine may provide better protection against COVID-19. People who have weakened immune systems often need more than one vaccination for various illnesses.

Currently, the extra dose is recommended for people who:

- Are receiving certain types of cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood.
- Are receiving treatment with corticosteroids or other medications that may suppress the immune system.
- Received an organ transplant and are taking medication to suppress the immune system.
- Received a stem cell transplant within the last two years.
- Have a moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency disorder such as DiGeorge syndrome or Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome.
- Have advanced or untreated HIV infection.

You can get an extra dose any time after four weeks have passed since you received the single dose of the Johnson & Johnson Janssen vaccine or the second dose of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.
Who should get a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and who is eligible?

Most people should get the booster dose as soon as they are eligible.

Currently, the Pfizer vaccine is the only one that has been approved to be given as a booster. It can be given to those who received the two-dose series of the Pfizer vaccine AND who are:

- 65 years of age and older.
- Living in a long-term care facility.
- 50 to 64 years of age and who have an underlying health condition that might put them at risk of severe disease. Examples of underlying conditions include diabetes, asthma, COPD and obesity.

In addition, those who received the two-dose series of the Pfizer vaccine AND who are in any of the following categories should consider getting the booster:

- Those who are 18 to 49 years of age and have an underlying health condition that might put them at risk of severe disease.
- Those who are 18 to 64 years of age and are at increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission because of their job or time spent in an institutional setting. Examples include health care workers, teachers, day care staff, grocery workers and those in homeless shelters and prisons.

When should people get the booster?

Currently, health care providers recommend getting the booster after six months have passed since someone received the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine. Health care providers recommend people who are immunocompromised get the booster six months after they received the extra dose.

Any of the recommendations in this resource may change as health care providers learn more. For the most up-to-date information and recommendations, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website.
Why should people get a booster?

Health care providers have learned that protection may have waned over time since people received their first dose or doses. The booster may provide better protection from COVID-19.

Before you get an extra dose or a booster, your health care team needs proof you received the first dose or doses. You can show your vaccination card as proof or your health care provider needs to find documentation in your medical records.

If you are eligible to receive an extra or booster dose, get it as soon as you are able according to the current guidelines. Refer to the CDC for information about who should get an extra or booster dose and when to get it.
What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Short-term mild or moderate vaccine reactions last only a day or two. About 15% of people develop short-term soreness at the injection site. About half of people who get the vaccine develop a headache, chills, fatigue, muscle or joint pain or a fever lasting a day or two.

Keep in mind these side effects mean the immune system is responding to the vaccine. The benefits of the vaccine outweigh the discomfort of the side effects.

When people received the extra or booster doses, studies show people have similar symptoms to the ones they had after the first dose or doses. These symptoms are usually mild and only last a day or so.

What to do about side effects

Many people do not have reactions after vaccination. However, if you do, this does not mean you have COVID-19. If you have a reaction, take some time to rest and allow your body to recover.

Side effects should not keep you from going to work or doing other activities. However, stay home if you have a fever. It is not necessary to have a COVID-19 test or quarantine.

If you have reactions that prevent you from eating, sleeping or going to work, contact your health care provider. Also contact your health care provider if you have reactions that last longer than three days.

Signs of an allergic reaction include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness or weakness. **If you have any of these signs, call 911 or have someone drive you to the nearest emergency department.**

Where to get vaccinated or get an extra or booster dose

It’s easy to find somewhere to get the vaccine. It is available in many places – doctors’ offices, retail stores, pharmacies, malls, airports and community centers.

If you need help finding a place to get vaccinated or get an extra or booster dose, call your health care provider or your local county health department.
Do Not Delay: Get Vaccinated!

Please consider getting vaccinated. Consider getting your children and any others in your household vaccinated. These are a few benefits of doing so:

• Your family may not have to quarantine after exposure.
• You and your children may be able to play sports, hang out with friends, take part in other activities and worry less about getting COVID-19.
• Your family’s mental health may improve with a return to some normalcy.
• You and your family can get back to doing the things you enjoy doing together.
Notes
Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal Mayo Clinic patient of more than 40 years and a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family’s activities in oil, gas and ranching. Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.

This material is for your education and information only. This content does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. New medical research may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, always talk with your health care provider.