

COVID-19 Vaccines

Questions & Answers

What are the short-term and long-term side effects?

Like other vaccines, you may feel some side effects. These are signs the vaccine is working. Your arm where you got the shot might be painful, red, or swollen. You could also have tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever, and nausea. You might not feel like doing your usual activities, but these side effects should go away in a few days.¹

We have a lot of data on vaccines for COVID-19 and other diseases, and there is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines cause long-term harm. Vaccine side effects usually happen within six weeks of getting the shot, so the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required scientists to study the clinical trial participants for at least eight weeks after the last dose. Based on the data, experts are confident that these vaccines are safe in the long term.²

How can I trust something developed so quickly?

The COVID-19 vaccine development process did not skip any steps. They went through the same process as other vaccines, just on a faster timeline. Vaccines normally go through three phases of clinical trials before the FDA approves them. The COVID-19 vaccines still went through these three phases, but they did some of the phases at the same time, with some stages overlapping.³

How are side effects reported and monitored?

The FDA, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Washington State Department of Health (DOH) watch for safety concerns through reports to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). You or your vaccine provider can report serious side effects to VAERS (vaers.hhs.gov).

You can also sign up for v-safe (cdc.gov/vsafe) through CDC. V-safe sends you check-in texts, and you can report any side effects from the vaccine.

If needed, the FDA will act to keep people safe. This happened in April, when the FDA paused the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to look into a rare reaction (six reported cases out of 6.8 million vaccine doses given). You can find more information on the pause at www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/VaccineInformation/JJUpdateRussian.

How do you know COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

Scientists tested each of the COVID-19 vaccines on tens of thousands of people in clinical trials. People of many races, ethnicities, and ages participated in the trials around the world. The vaccine is reaching more people every day too (the United States has given nearly 296 million doses as of June 2021), which means we get more data on safety and side effects.⁴ Results show the COVID-19 vaccines are safe, and serious side effects are rare.

Do vaccines alter DNA?

No, COVID-19 vaccines do not change or affect your DNA. All the vaccines available deliver instructions to our cells to start building protection against the virus that causes COVID-19. The vaccine does not enter the part of the cell where our DNA is kept. Instead, the vaccines work with our body's natural defenses to build immunity.

What are the differences between the vaccines?

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are mRNA vaccines. COVID-19 mRNA vaccines do not change or interact with your DNA in any way. mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response to build antibodies. This protects us from getting sick if the real virus enters our bodies.

The Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine is a viral vector vaccine. Viral vector vaccines use a safe version of a different virus (a cold virus) to deliver instructions to a cell. The vaccine does not infect you with that cold virus or COVID-19.

If I had COVID-19, do I need a vaccine?

*Yes, you should get the vaccine even if you already had COVID-19.*⁵ Data shows it is uncommon to get COVID-19 again in the 90 days after you were infected. That means you might have some protection from COVID-19 (called natural immunity) for at least a little while. But we don't know how long natural immunity might last. And if you rely only on natural immunity, you risk getting sick or spreading the virus to others. That is why it is important to get the vaccine, even if you had COVID-19 before.

If you currently have COVID-19, wait to get the vaccine until you feel better and your isolation period is over.

For more information:

DOH.WA.GOV/Coronavirus or COVIDVaccineWA.org or 1-800-525-0127, then press #.
Language assistance is available.

How long does the vaccine protect you?

Scientists continue to monitor people who participated in the COVID-19 vaccine trials. To date, participants are still protected by the vaccine, so we know that it lasts at least six months.⁶ We will continue to learn more about this as scientists follow those trial participants over the two-year period of the trials.

What will it cost? Do I need health insurance?

In the United States, the federal government covers the cost of COVID-19 vaccines for all people living in the country, regardless of immigration status. If you do not have health insurance, providers are still required to give you a COVID-19 vaccine at no cost. Providers cannot charge you any vaccine administration fees, copays, or coinsurance if you only go in to get vaccinated.⁷

Is it safe for me to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I want to have a baby one day?

Your worries around reproductive health and vaccines are understandable. Here is what we know: there is no scientific evidence that vaccines cause infertility or impotence. When the vaccine enters your body, it works with your immune system to create antibodies to fight the coronavirus. This process does not interfere with your reproductive organs.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for me if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

There is no evidence that COVID-19 causes any problems with pregnancy. You do not need to stop breastfeeding if you want to get vaccinated. In fact, early reports suggest the vaccine might help your body pass antibodies to your baby through breastmilk. More studies are needed, but if this is confirmed, it will help protect your baby from COVID-19.⁸

You can find more information about the COVID-19 vaccines in the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) Fact Sheets, available at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/eua/index.html.

For information about safety data and side effects for other vaccines, read [the Vaccine Information Statements \(VIS\): www.immunize.org/vis/](http://www.immunize.org/vis/).

Can I prevent COVID-19 with home remedies?

*There are no home remedies that can prevent or cure COVID-19.*⁹ You may see some rumors online about untrue home remedies, but these are generally myths. There is no evidence that foods or other home remedies can protect you from COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself from COVID-19 is to get the vaccine.

Does the COVID-19 vaccine protect me against variants?

Current data suggest that COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the United States offer protection against most variants currently spreading in the United States. However, some variants might cause illness in some people even after they are fully vaccinated.¹⁰

Sources

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Possible Side Effects After Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine. Available online:

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² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Safety of COVID-19 Vaccines. Available online: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/safety-of-vaccines.html>

³ Adult Vaccine Access Coalition. AVAC's Infographic Explains Accelerated Development of COVID Vaccine.

<https://adultvaccinesnow.org/resources/avacs-infographic-explains-accelerated-development-of-covid-vaccine/>

⁴ Washington State Department of Health (2021 April 16). COVID-19 Vaccines: Just the facts! (Part 2=1).

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⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). COVID-19 Data Tracker. Available online: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations>

⁶ Ledford, H. (04 June 2021). Six months of COVID vaccines: What 1.7 billion doses have taught scientists. Nature,

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01505-x>

⁷ National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants, University of Minnesota. Fact Sheets. <https://nrcrim.org/vaccines/fact-sheets-0>

⁸ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (2021). Coronavirus (COVID-19), Pregnancy, and Breastfeeding: A Message for Patients. Available online: <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding>

⁹ Washington State Department of Health (2021 April 23). COVID-19 Vaccines: Just the facts! (Part 2)

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¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Vaccines Work. Available online: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/effectiveness/work.html>.