

# COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs

## About the Vaccine

### How do COVID-19 vaccines work?

Vaccines work with your body's natural defenses so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. This is also called immunity. COVID-19 vaccination works by teaching your immune system how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19, and this protects you from getting sick with the virus.

To learn more about how vaccines work, see: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/how-they-work.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/how-they-work.html)



### Will the vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. There is no live virus in the vaccines, so they can't infect you.

### How did they make the vaccine so quickly?

Many pharmaceutical companies invested significant resources into

quickly developing a vaccine for COVID-19 because of the world-wide impact of the pandemic. Both Pfizer and Moderna used similar processes when developing their vaccine. Even though COVID-19 is new, these types of viruses (called coronaviruses) have been studied since the 1960s. This knowledge helped scientists understand the virus to make a vaccine.

### How do we really know if COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) reviews all data before recommending any COVID-19 vaccine.

More than 70,000 people of different ages, races, ethnicities, and medical conditions participated in clinical trials to make sure the vaccines meet safety standards and offer the protections we need.



For more on ensuring the safety of COVID-19 vaccines, see: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety.html)



## Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for children?

The focus of COVID-19 vaccine development has been on adults. Pfizer's vaccine has been authorized for ages 16 and up. Moderna's vaccine is currently authorized for ages 18 and up.

## Will a COVID-19 vaccine alter my DNA?

No. The COVID-19 vaccine has mRNA in it and is not able to change a person's genetic makeup (DNA). The vaccine never enters the nucleus of the cell, which is where our DNA are kept. This means the vaccine does not affect or interact with our DNA in any way.

## Do either of these vaccines have mercury, aluminum, or formaldehyde in them?

No. The vaccines that are currently available do not have mercury, aluminum, formaldehyde, or preservatives.

For information on the ingredients of the vaccines, see:



Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine EUA Fact Sheet for Recipients and Caregivers (Pfizer): [www.fda.gov/media/144414/download](https://www.fda.gov/media/144414/download)



Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine EUA Fact Sheet for Recipients and Caregivers (Moderna): [www.fda.gov/media/144638/download](https://www.fda.gov/media/144638/download)

## Does the vaccine sterilize women?

No. Stories and claims on social media and anti-vaccination websites saying that the vaccine interferes with the formation of the placenta are false. There is no evidence the vaccine would result in sterilization of women.

# Getting Vaccinated

## When will I get vaccinated?

The federal and state government is overseeing the distribution of the vaccination. Most vaccines are being distributed directly to healthcare providers. Due to the limited amount of vaccine, the state of California developed a prioritization plan for who gets the vaccine when, based on their risk of getting COVID-19.



For more on the priority plan, see: [covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/#When-can-I-get-vaccinated](https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/#When-can-I-get-vaccinated)

## How can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Most people will get vaccinated through their healthcare providers.

If you are a healthcare worker, contact your employer.

If you are a Long-Term Care Facilities



(LTCF) resident, contact your caretaker.

In many parts of the state, CVS and Walgreen pharmacies will administer the vaccines to residents in long-term care and staff.

### **What happens when I get the vaccine?**

The vaccines currently available require two shots spaced 3–4 weeks apart. The first shot helps your body recognize the virus and helps prepare your immune system, and the second shot strengthens that immune response.

### **What happens if I only get 1 shot?**

You need both shots to be fully protected. We strongly recommend that you get both shots.

### **How much does it cost?**

Vaccine doses purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars will be given to the American people at no cost. However, vaccination providers will be able to charge an administration fee for giving the shot to someone. Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund.

### **Will I be able to choose which vaccine I get?**

No. The vaccine you get will be based on what your provider has available. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are almost identical. There are no differences in how well they work or their safety.

### **Is taking the vaccine mandatory?**

No, but you are strongly encouraged to get the vaccine once it's available.

### **Do I need to have a COVID-19 test before I get the vaccine?**

No, you do not need a COVID-19 test before getting a vaccine.

### **I have allergies. Should I take the vaccine?**

CDC recommends that people with a history of severe allergic reactions not related to vaccines or injectable medications — such as food, pet, venom, environmental, or latex allergies — get vaccinated. If you have had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, you should not get either of the currently available mRNA COVID-19 vaccines. If you had a severe allergic reaction after getting the first dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, CDC recommends that you should not get the second dose.



## Is there any reason I shouldn't get the vaccine?

Because of age, health conditions, or other factors, some people should not get certain vaccines or should wait before getting them.

To learn more about who should NOT get the vaccine, see:



[www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html)

## Do I have to get a vaccine if I've already had COVID-19?

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 been sick with COVID-19 before.

At this time, experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. The protection someone gains from having an infection (called natural immunity) varies depending on the disease, and it varies from person to person. Since this virus is new, we don't know how long natural immunity might last. So far reinfection has been rare.

## If I'm pregnant or breastfeeding, should I get the vaccine?

According to the CDC, we don't yet have information about how safe it is

for people who are pregnant to get a vaccine for COVID-19. However, they do state that if you are breastfeeding or are pregnant and are part of a group recommended to receive the vaccine, you may choose to be vaccinated. We suggest you talk with your health care provider so you can make an informed decision.

## Do I still have to wear a mask after getting the vaccine?

Yes. It's possible for you to spread the virus even after getting the vaccine. The vaccine is designed to stop the virus from making you sick. We don't yet know if the vaccine will stop you from spreading the virus.

# Vaccine Effectiveness

## Do the vaccines work differently or have different side effects for people of diverse ages, racial backgrounds, sexes, and other differences?

Trial results have shown that the vaccines are safe and work well for adults of all ages, races, genders, and ethnic backgrounds.



## How long will the COVID-19 vaccine last?

The research is not complete on this. Further research will tell us more about how long immunity lasts and if people will need more shots in the future.

## Can I still get COVID after I get the vaccine?

It's possible. While both vaccines are shown to be highly effective in preventing people from getting sick from the virus (90-95%), you can still get COVID-19 and be sick even if you get the vaccination. Most studies show that most people who get the vaccine, get less sick than those who do not get the vaccine. But until we can vaccinate everyone and because we don't know if the vaccine can stop you from spreading the virus, it's important to continue wearing a mask, avoiding crowds, socially distancing, and washing your hands frequently.

## What to Expect After Vaccination

### What are the side effects?

The vaccines may cause side effects in some people. For most people, these side effects will last no longer than a day or two.

### Possible side effects include:

On the arm where you got the shot:

- Pain, redness, and swelling

Throughout the rest of your body:

- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Joint and body aches

To reduce pain and discomfort where you got the shot:

- Apply a clean, cool, wet washcloth over the area
- Use or exercise your arm

To reduce other symptoms, talk to your doctor about taking an over-the-counter medication such as Tylenol or Ibuprofen.

Side effects are a sign that the vaccine is working to help teach your body how to fight COVID-19 if you are exposed. They do NOT mean you have COVID-19. You can't get COVID-19 from the vaccine. If you have questions about your health after your shot, call your doctor, nurse, health care provider or clinic.

### Are there long-term side effects from COVID-19 vaccine?

Because all COVID-19 vaccines are new, it will take more time and more people getting vaccinated to learn about very rare or possible long-term side effects.



# Vaccine Planning

## When can we get the COVID-19 vaccination?

The state is determining who is getting vaccinated and when. They have outlined a plan based who is most at risk at contracting the virus.

The state has divided vaccine allocation into phases. Currently, California has only defined Phase 1a, which is split into three tiers and covers more than 80,000 people in San Francisco. It includes frontline healthcare workers at highest risk of being exposed to COVID-19 from their job, such as: acute care nurses, doctors, janitors, EMTs, and paramedics. It also includes residents of skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, and similar settings for older or medically-vulnerable individuals.

## Who will get the COVID-19 vaccine first?

The state plan for vaccination provides the vaccine to those most at risk of getting the COVID-19 from their job and as well as older or vulnerable people. The plan has been split into phases (1a, 1b, 1c) and within those phases are tiers. San Francisco is currently in Phase 1a. More than 80,000 people in San Francisco are in Phase 1a.

## Phase 1a has 3 tiers.

See [www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/CDPH-Allocation-Guidelines-for-COVID-19-Vaccine-During-Phase-1A-Recommendations.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/CDPH-Allocation-Guidelines-for-COVID-19-Vaccine-During-Phase-1A-Recommendations.aspx)



### Tier 1

- Acute care, psychiatric, and correctional facility hospitals
- Skilled nursing facilities
- First responders (paramedics, EMTs)
- Dialysis centers

### Tier 2

- Intermediate care facilities
- Home health care and in-home supportive services
- Community health workers
- Public health field staff
- Primary and urgent care clinics

### Tier 3

- Specialty clinics
- Laboratory workers
- Dental and other oral health clinics
- Pharmacy staff not working in settings at higher tiers







Phase 1b is proposed but has not been approved. You can find updates here: [covid19.ca.gov/vaccines](https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines)

**1b Tier One:**

- Individuals 75 and older
- Those at risk of exposure at work in the following sectors: education, childcare, emergency services, and food and agriculture

**1b Tier Two:**

- Individuals 65–74 years of age
- Those at risk of exposure at work in the following sectors: transportation and logistics; industrial, commercial, residential, and sheltering facilities and services; critical manufacturing
- Congregate settings with outbreak risk: incarcerated and homeless

**Other Links:**

There are several safety monitoring systems set up in the US, including:



Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS): [vaers.hhs.gov](https://vaers.hhs.gov)



Clinical Immunization Safety Assessment Project (CISA): [www.cdc.gov/vaccine-safety/ensuringsafety/monitoring/cisa/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccine-safety/ensuringsafety/monitoring/cisa/index.html)



Vaccine safety datalink: [www.cdc.gov/vaccine-safety/ensuringsafety/monitoring/vsd/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccine-safety/ensuringsafety/monitoring/vsd/index.html)



“V-safe”: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety.html)



For additional and updated information about vaccine allocations, visit the California Department of Public Health’s website: [www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID-19Vaccine.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID-19Vaccine.aspx)



**San Francisco Vaccine Information**  
To learn more about vaccines in San Francisco, visit: [sf.gov/covidvaccine](https://sf.gov/covidvaccine)

