



COVID-19 vaccine basics: What you need to know

About the COVID-19 vaccines

One hundred and forty million – **more than half of U.S. adults** – have gotten at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose.¹ Getting vaccinated for COVID is the first step in a long journey to return to normalcy.

The Joint Commission recognizes that accepting any medical treatment can cause some anxiety. We realize that it may be difficult to determine what information to trust. We hope this fact sheet helps answer questions related to your personal vaccination decisions and will provide information that you can use in conversations with your loved ones about their decisions.

What vaccines are available?

Currently, three vaccines are available and all three have been authorized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for emergency use to combat the pandemic in the United States. This means that among tens of thousands of trial participants, each vaccine was highly successful at preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19. They have also met the FDA's stringent standards for safety. The available vaccines are:

- **Pfizer-BioNTech**,² which is 95% effective at preventing laboratory confirmed COVID-19
- **Moderna**,³ which is 94.1% effective at preventing laboratory-confirmed COVID-19
- **Johnson & Johnson**,⁴ which is 85% effective at preventing hospitalization and death from COVID-19

The **Pfizer-BioNTech** and **Moderna** vaccines are mRNA vaccines,⁵ a technology that teaches our bodies to produce an immune response to the coronavirus. They both require two doses, 3-4 weeks apart, respectively. The **Johnson & Johnson** vaccine requires one dose. It uses a modified common cold virus as a carrier to deliver instructions to the body to build an immune response to COVID.⁶ The modified virus cannot cause a cold because it cannot replicate. This vaccine uses technology that is similar to what's been used to manufacture existing influenza and measles vaccines.⁷

It is not uncommon in the first couple of days after receiving these vaccines, to experience one or more side effects, including pain, redness, swelling, or rash at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever or nausea, similar to a mild flu. These symptoms should resolve within a few days.⁸

What are the benefits of being vaccinated?

Overall, data from trials and the millions of vaccines that have been given so far overwhelmingly show that all three COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.⁹

Based on current knowledge, being vaccinated means you will have a significantly reduced risk of experiencing severe COVID and everything that goes along with it – including less risk of hospitalization, a long recovery period, prolonged period with COVID symptoms, and extended time away from work and family.

Recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that fully vaccinated people can visit other fully vaccinated people indoors without wearing masks or social distancing.¹⁰ Additionally, fully vaccinated people do not have to quarantine or obtain a COVID-19 test following a known exposure if they are not experiencing COVID symptoms. They can resume domestic travel and do not need to get tested before or after travel or self-quarantine after travel.

Are there any disadvantages to being vaccinated?

In addition to the mild to moderate side effects, people who might be prone to allergic reactions may experience a reaction from their COVID vaccine, though extremely rare.^{11,12} If you are prone to reactions, be sure to follow the provider's instructions about an onsite waiting period, which is usually 15 minutes to ½ hour. Let a provider know immediately if you start to notice any signs of a reaction so you can receive treatment.¹³

There are some individuals who should not be vaccinated with a specific type of COVID vaccine or any COVID vaccine. CDC provides further information in its [Interim Clinical Considerations for Use of COVID-19 Vaccines Currently Authorized in the United States](#). If you're worried about a side effect or potential contraindication, be sure to speak with your health care provider.

How do I approach a conversation with a loved one about them getting a vaccine?

We all want our family and friends to be safe from the effects of a potentially severe case of COVID-19. However, many people experience hesitancy around vaccines – especially with the widespread disinformation on social media.

It is important to approach these conversations knowing that taking a vaccine is a choice, and no one can force another person to accept one. However, recent research from the American Medical Association and the Ad Council¹⁴ has shown that a few techniques can help you talk others through vaccine hesitancy.

- **Acknowledge concerns**, rather than challenge them.
- Focus on **moments missed** and that vaccination is an important step to return to normal.
- Emphasize **protecting** oneself, loved ones and the most vulnerable.

- Use a **positive tone**. Be respectful while acknowledging that receiving a vaccine is a choice, tying back to American values of liberty and freedom.

For more information on COVID-19 vaccines, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](#).¹⁵

Sources:

¹ <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/Pfizer-BioNTech.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/Moderna.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/janssen.html>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mRNA.html>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/viralvector.html>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/viral-vector-vaccine-basics.html#:~:text=In%20the%20development%20of%20viral,stage%20COVID%2D19%20vaccine%20trials.>

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/expect/after.html>

⁹ <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/index.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

¹¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7004e1.htm#:~:text=Among%20these%20case%20reports%2C%2010,a%20previous%20history%20of%20anaphylaxis.>

¹² https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7002e1.htm?s_cid=mm7002e1_w

¹³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html>

¹⁴ https://adcouncil-covid-vaccine-education-initiative.s3.amazonaws.com/AC_CC_COVIDVACCINEEDUCATIONINATIVE_DECK.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html>