COVID-19 VACCINE COMMON QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

**What are the kinds of COVID-19 vaccines and how do they work?**

Right now, there are three approved vaccines, from the Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson companies. The ones available to you depend on overall supply and the vaccination site. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work the same way. They contain a small piece of the virus, but not the whole thing. Getting the vaccine trains your body to recognize the virus and kill it. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is different. It uses a dead common cold virus to get a small piece of the COVID-19 virus into your body. It only requires one dose. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine doesn’t protect quite as well against mild cases of COVID-19, but it does protect as well against severe illness.

**What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?**

It may hurt a little where you got the shot. You may also be tired, get a fever, and have head or body aches. These side effects are good! They mean your body is getting immune. Very rarely, a person has an allergic reaction to the vaccine right after getting it. That is why patients must wait 15-30 minutes after getting the vaccine.

**Can the vaccine give me or my family COVID-19?**

No. None of the COVID-19 vaccines being used in the United States have live viruses, so they can’t give you the disease. And because you won’t have the live virus, you can’t give it to your family.

**How can a safe vaccine be ready so quickly?**

For three main reasons. First, because scientists have been studying coronaviruses for many years. Second, because of the severity of the pandemic, scientists all over the world worked together to find the vaccine. And third, the United States paid drug companies over $12 billion. This paid for all the steps to make the new drug.

**I don’t trust the government to give me health information.**

Talk with your healthcare provider about your concerns and ask them for other trusted sources. Social media is not a good place to get health information.

**Does the vaccine have something in it to track or control people?**

The vaccine does not stay in your body, so there is nothing in it that can track or control you. Getting the vaccine trains your body to recognize the virus and kill it. In that process, everything from the vaccine is destroyed. To keep people healthy, Massachusetts does keep track of everyone who gets a vaccine. By law, only healthcare providers and health officials can see this.

**I already had COVID-19. Do I still need the vaccine?**

Yes. You can get COVID-19 a second time. If you were treated with antibodies or plasma, you should wait 90 days before getting the vaccine.

**I don’t need a vaccine. My immunity is already strong, or I use natural remedies.**

It’s great that you are already healthy. But COVID-19 is a new virus that your body hasn’t met before. Getting the vaccine will train your body to recognize and kill the virus.

**How long will immunity last?**

Scientists don’t know yet. It may be a couple years. If this is the case, people may need to get the vaccine every year, as is done with influenza.

**Can I get COVID-19 even after getting the vaccine?**

If you were infected right before you got the vaccine, you can still get COVID-19. And after getting the vaccine, if you are exposed to COVID-19, you can give it to other people while your body is fighting it—even if you don’t have any symptoms. That’s why you need to keep following the rules to stay safe during the pandemic.

**I always get sick from the flu shot, so vaccines are not good for me.**

Vaccine side effects are signs that your body is getting immune. Isn’t it better to feel a little sick from the flu shot than to be one of the thousands of people who die from influenza every year? And isn’t it better to feel a little sick from the COVID-19 vaccine than to be one of the almost half million Americans who have died in the pandemic?

**I’m trying to have a baby, pregnant, or nursing. Should I still get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Getting the vaccine has not made women infertile. Scientists still don’t know much about pregnancy or nursing and the vaccine. But pregnant women can get very sick with COVID-19. If you are pregnant or nursing, talk with your healthcare provider about what’s best for you and your baby.

**Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I have food or drug allergies?**

Yes. But you should tell the nurses and other medical staff at your vaccination site. They will want to watch you for 30 minutes to make sure you don’t have an allergic reaction to the vaccine.

**Has anyone died from the COVID-19 vaccine?**

No one has died from the COVID-19 vaccine in the United States. But if you are over 80 years old, high risk, or very ill, talk with your healthcare provider about what to do.

**The vaccine is just another way for drug companies to make money.**

The United States government already paid the drug companies over $12 billion so that everyone can get the COVID-19 vaccine for free.

**Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for people with health conditions or who take medicine?**

The vaccine is safe for people with health conditions or who take medicine. It may not work as well if you have immune system or neurological problems. It also may not work as well if you take steroids or other drugs for inflammation. Talk with your healthcare provider about what is right for you.

**How quickly does the two-dose vaccine protect you from COVID-19? What if I got really sick after the first dose?**

After both doses, most people’s bodies can kill the COVID-19 virus. But scientists aren’t sure if you can still pass COVID-19 to others—even if you don’t get sick. So you should still follow the rules about how to be safe during the pandemic. If you get really sick after either dose, it shows that the vaccine is building your immunity.

**Can children get the vaccine?**

 Not yet. Children will get the vaccine later. Drug companies are now doing studies on children and will know by summer how they react to the vaccine. Young people 16 years old or over who have health conditions or are essential workers can get the vaccine earlier.

**When can I get the vaccine?**

The state of Massachusetts has a plan for when everyone can get the vaccine. Go here to see it: https://bit.ly/2MBqREW. If you are in a high-risk category, you will be contacted by your health center to set up an appointment.

**Does the vaccine protect against new COVID-19 variants?**

It is too early to know. But just in case, drug companies are looking into creating boosters for people who already got the vaccine and changing the vaccine so that it kills the new variants, too.

**What if I miss my appointment for the second dose of the vaccine?**

That’s OK. Make another appointment for as soon as possible, preferably within 6 weeks of your first dose. But even if that doesn’t happen, you should still get your second shot.