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What You Need to Know: COVID-19 Vaccines for Older Adults (65+)

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The best protection against COVID-19 is to be up to date with your vaccines.

You are **up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines** if you have gotten your primary series of COVID-19 shots and a bivalent booster (the updated booster).

Staying up to date with the COVID-19 vaccination will protect you and others against the virus

COVID-19 is the disease caused by a highly infectious virus called SARS-CoV-2. Sometimes cases of COVID-19 can be mild, but others can be more severe and even deadly. This is especially true for older adults or people with chronic health conditions. One in 100 older Americans have died from COVID-19 disease. 75% of all COVID-19 deaths in the United States have been among adults 65 years or older.

You are up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine if you have completed a primary series of COVID-19 shots and received the bivalent booster shot recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Staying up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine has many benefits:

- It will lower your risk of getting sick if you are exposed to the coronavirus.
 - Even if you are up to date with the vaccine, it is still possible to get COVID-19. However, data from real-world use of COVID-19 vaccines shows that vaccination substantially lowers the risk of becoming seriously ill if you do get infected.
- It helps protect the people you are around, especially people with a higher risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19. This includes older people and people with chronic, underlying conditions.

People who are immunocompromised or take medicine that affects the immune system are at higher risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19. It is especially important for immunocompromised people to stay up to date on their vaccines.

FDA Approvals (as of March 2023)

Primary Series

As of March 2023, the FDA has fully authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines. The FDA has provided emergency use authorization for the Novavax and Johnson & Johnson/Janssen (J&J) vaccines.

Updated Bivalent Booster

The bivalent COVID-19 vaccines protect us against two different strains of COVID-19. The only COVID-19 bivalent booster vaccines approved by the FDA (September 8, 2022) are the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna (age 18+) bivalent vaccines.

CDC Recommendations for Staying Up-to-Date with COVID-19 Vaccines

FDA Approved Vaccine Shots for Older Adults (65+)

| Vaccine | Primary Series | Bivalent Boosters |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pfizer-BioNTech* | 2 shots, 3 weeks apart | 1 shot, at least 2 months after your last primary series shot or any other booster shots you received. |
| Moderna | 2 shots, 4 weeks apart | |
| Novavax** | 2 shots, 3 weeks apart | |
| Johnson & Johnson/Janssen*** | 1 shot of J&J/Janssen vaccine - 1 booster shot of either Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech at least two months after first shot of J&J/Janssen | Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna |

* See the [CDC page](#) on the Pfizer bivalent booster for further information on risks and benefits.

**The monovalent Novavax vaccine may be used as a booster dose in limited situations in people ages 18 years and older. It may be used for those who have not received any previous booster dose(s), and who are unable or unwilling to receive an mRNA vaccine and would otherwise not receive a booster dose.

***Johnson & Johnson/Janssen is authorized for use in certain limited situations due to safety considerations.

FDA Approved Vaccine Shots for Immunocompromised Older Adults (65+)

| Vaccine | Primary Series | Bivalent Boosters |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pfizer-BioNTech* | 3 shots -2nd shot given 3 weeks after 1st shot -3rd shot given at least 4 weeks after 2nd shot | 1 shot, at least 2 months after your last primary series shot or last booster Must be Pfizer-BioNTech |
| Moderna | 3 shots -2nd shot given 4 weeks after 1st shot -3rd shot given at least 4 weeks after 2nd shot | 1 shot, at least 2 months after your last primary series shot or last booster Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna |
| Novavax** | 2 shots, 3 weeks apart | |
| Johnson & Johnson/Janssen*** | 2 shots, 4 weeks apart - 2nd shot should be Pfizer or Moderna | |

* See the [CDC page](#) on the Pfizer bivalent booster for further information on risks and benefits.

**The monovalent Novavax vaccine may be used as a booster dose in limited situations in people ages 18 years and older. It may be used for those who have not received any previous booster dose(s), and who are unable or unwilling to receive an mRNA vaccine and would otherwise not receive a booster dose.

***Johnson & Johnson/Janssen is authorized for use in certain limited situations due to safety consideration. A monovalent J&J/Janssen booster is also available in limited situations.

Vaccine Safety

Safety has been key in developing and approving COVID-19 vaccines. There were many steps taken to make sure the COVID-19 vaccines were safe before they were made available to the public.

- **First**, clinical trials were carefully designed and controlled to find out how safe and effective the vaccines are. Tens of thousands of people participated in the clinical trials.
- **After** the clinical trials proved the vaccines were safe and effective, then the FDA and independent expert advisory boards reviewed the data to make sure they were correct.
- **Then**, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) at the CDC reviewed all safety data before recommending any COVID-19 vaccine for use.
- **Finally**, after all these steps were completed, the FDA provided full authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines. The FDA provided an emergency use authorization for the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen (J&J) and Novavax vaccines.

The CDC and other partners assess the effectiveness and safety of the COVID-19 vaccines under real-world conditions after FDA approval.

Talk to your Primary Care Clinician or Vaccine Provider

The FDA fact sheets for the [Pfizer-BioNTech](#), [Moderna](#), [Johnson & Johnson](#), and [Novavax](#) primary series vaccines and the [Pfizer-BioNTech](#) and [Moderna](#) bivalent booster vaccines have more information about the benefits and risks of each vaccine. We recommend that you discuss the risks and benefits of getting vaccinated with your primary care clinician or vaccine provider before getting the shots.

Tell your vaccination provider about all your medical conditions, including if you:

- Have any allergies
- Have a fever
- Have a bleeding disorder or take blood-thinning drugs
- Are immunocompromised or take medicine that affects your immune system
- Have received another COVID-19 vaccine

They will discuss any other factors you need to know before receiving a COVID-19 vaccine based on your unique circumstances.



DID YOU KNOW?

FDA-approved vaccines are currently available at no cost to you:

- If you have Medicare, you will not have to pay to get vaccinated.
- Medicaid and private health insurance plans cover all vaccine costs.
- If you are uninsured you can get free vaccines.

Vaccines are available at many locations:

- Most drug stores
- Community health centers
- State or local health departments

Find a COVID-19 vaccine location near you:

- Ask your doctor or healthcare provider
- Call 1-800-232-0233
- Text your zip code to 438829 or visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov)



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The AGS Health in Aging Foundation is dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of all older people. We aim to empower older adults and caregivers to actively participate in their health care and decision-making.

DISCLAIMER: This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other healthcare provider. Always consult your healthcare provider about your medications, symptoms, and health problems. March 2023

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