



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

Getting a 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.

- **Adults 65 and older should receive a 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 vaccine: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or Novavax.***

The best protection against COVID-19 is to get vaccinated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends receiving an updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine. Getting the vaccine has many benefits:

- It will lower your risk of getting sick if you are exposed to the coronavirus.
 - Even if you have received 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 receive COVID-19 vaccines.

* See the next page for COVID vaccine recommendations for people with weak immune systems.

FDA Approvals (as of October 2023)

Three COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers, Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Novavax, have developed 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 vaccines. These updated COVID-19 vaccines protect us against the COVID-19 variant strain called XBB.1.5. The FDA has provided an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for all three updated vaccines.

Differences Between the Vaccines

The Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines are mRNA vaccines. That means that the mRNA in the vaccine teaches our cells how to trigger the immune response against the COVID-19 virus.

Novavax is a protein subunit vaccine. This means that it contains proteins of the virus that causes COVID-19. Your immune system learns how to respond to the protein in the vaccine so it can respond to the actual virus and protect you against COVID-19.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has no preference for which vaccine you should receive.

COVID-19 Vaccines for Immunocompromised Older Adults (65+)

There are different vaccine recommendations for immunocompromised older adults. A person is immunocompromised when their immune system is weak. These people may have more trouble fighting COVID-19 and are at higher risk of getting seriously sick or dying from COVID-19. You may have a weak immune system if you have cancer, diabetes, or heart condition, for example. These are just a few of the diseases that can make your immune system weak. Please check with your healthcare professional to see if you have a medical problem that makes your immune system weak. See the table on the next page for details on COVID vaccines for older adults who have a weak immune system.

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CDC COVID-19 2023-2024 Updated Vaccine Recommendations for Immunocompromised Older Adults (65+)

| Previous COVID vaccination history | Which 2023-2024 Updated Vaccine is right for you | Number of Updated Vaccine doses to receive | Dosing schedule |
|--|--|--|---|
| If you have never received a COVID-19 vaccine before | Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech or Novavax | 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <u>Moderna</u> (3 doses) Doses 1 and 2: given 4 weeks apart Doses 2 and 3: given at least 4 weeks apart ■ <u>Pfizer-BioNTech</u> (3 doses) Doses 1 and 2: given 3 weeks apart Doses 2 and 3: given at least 4 weeks apart ■ <u>Novavax</u> (2 doses) Doses 1 and 2: given 3 weeks apart |
| If you have previously received 1 dose of the Moderna or Pfizer- BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine | Same manufacturer as your previous vaccine | 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dose 1: at least 4 weeks after the last dose (<u>Moderna</u>) ■ Dose 1: at least 3 weeks after the last dose (<u>Pfizer-BioNTech</u>) ■ Doses 1 and 2: given at least 4 weeks apart |
| If you have previously received 2 doses of the Moderna or Pfizer- BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine | Same manufacturer as your previous vaccines | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dose 1: at least 4 weeks after the last dose |
| If you have previously received 3 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine | Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or Novavax | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dose 1: at least 8 weeks after the last dose |
| If you have previously received 1 or more doses of the Novavax or Janssen COVID-19 vaccine (including in combination with any mRNA vaccines) | Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or Novavax | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dose 1: at least 8 weeks after the last dose |

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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**, the FDA and CDC monitor the safety of vaccines post-authorization and recommendation via several system including the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, Vaccine Safety Datalink, V-safe program and others.

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](#), and [Novavax](#) 2023-2024 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.

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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 professional
- 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. October 2023

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