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

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

Adults 65 and older who have no immune problems should receive:

- **2 doses of the 2024-2025 COVID 19 vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or Novavax). You should get the vaccines 6 months apart.**
- **If you have never had a COVID-19 vaccine before, and you choose Novavax, you should wait 3 weeks between the 1st and 2nd doses. You will also need to get a 3rd dose of any of the three COVID-19 vaccines 6 months after the 2nd dose.**

For people who are immunocompromised, age and vaccine history determine which COVID-19 vaccine to get and the number of doses needed.

Getting a COVID-19 vaccination will protect you and others against the virus

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Some people who get COVID-19 might only feel a little sick, but others can get very sick or even die. 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.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you should get the 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccine. There are many reasons why getting the vaccine is important:

- **It lowers the chance of getting sick if you are exposed to the virus.**

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- Even if you have received the vaccine, it is still possible to get COVID-19. However, real-world data shows that the COVID-19 vaccines greatly reduces your chances of becoming seriously ill if you do get infected.
 - The vaccine also helps protect others, especially people who are more likely to get very sick from COVID-19, like older adults and those with chronic conditions.

People who have weakened immune systems or take medicines that affect their immune system are at higher risk of getting very sick or dying from COVID-19. It is very important for these people to get the COVID-19 vaccine. It is also important to know that you cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine. Vaccines do not cause infection from viruses, and they don't change our DNA or genes.

CDC COVID-19 2024-2025 Vaccine Recommendations for Older Adults (65+) Who have weakened immune system (immunocompromised)

There are different vaccine recommendations for older adults who have a weakened immune system. A person is considered immunocompromised when their immune system is not working as well as it should. People with a weak immune system may have a harder time fighting off COVID-19 and are at a higher risk of getting very sick or even dying from it. You might have a weak immune system if you have conditions like cancer, diabetes, or heart disease. These are just a few examples of health problems that can weaken your immune system. You should talk to your health care professional to find out if you have a condition that weakens your immune system.

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COVID-19 Vaccine Recommendations for Immunocompromised Older Adults

Previous COVID vaccination history	2024-2025 COVID-19 Vaccine	Number of 2024-2025 Vaccine doses to receive	Dosing schedule
Have never received a COVID-19 vaccine before	Moderna	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2nd dose: 4 weeks after 1st dose 3rd dose: At least 4 weeks after 2nd dose
	Pfizer-BioNTech	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2nd dose: 3 weeks after 1st dose 3rd dose: At least 4 weeks after 2nd dose
	Novavax	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2nd dose: 3 weeks after 1st dose
Previously received 1 dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine	Moderna	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2nd dose: 4 weeks after 1st dose 3rd dose: At least 4 weeks after 2nd dose
Previously received 1 dose of Pfizer- BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine	Pfizer-BioNTech	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2nd dose: 3 weeks after 1st dose 3rd dose: At least 4 weeks after 2nd dose
Previously received 1 dose of the Novavax vaccine	Novavax	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2nd dose: 3 weeks after 1st dose
Previously received 2 doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine	Moderna	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3rd dose: At least 4 weeks after 2nd dose
Previously received 2 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine	Pfizer-BioNTech	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3rd dose: At least 4 weeks after 2nd dose
Previously received 3 or more doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, NOT including any dose of 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccine	Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, or Novavax	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 8 weeks after last dose
Previously received 2 or more doses of Novavax, NOT including any dose of 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccine	Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, or Novavax	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 8 weeks after last dose

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Differences Between the Vaccines

The Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines are mRNA vaccines. The mRNA in the vaccine teaches our cells how to trigger the immune response against the COVID-19 virus. That way, if you encounter the COVID-19 virus after receiving the vaccine, your body will recognize the virus and fight it off. mRNA vaccines have been safely used for decades.

Novavax is a protein subunit vaccine. This means that it contains proteins of the virus that causes COVID-19. From this vaccine, 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. The vaccines work differently from each other but they all provide protection from the COVID-19 virus.

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 are safe:

- **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 US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reviewed the safety data to make sure they were correct. Once these vaccines were found to meet the high standards of safety and effectiveness, the FDA authorized the vaccine for use in the US..
- **Then**, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) at the CDC reviewed all available data about the vaccine before determining whether to recommend it and who should receive it. These vaccine recommendations then go through an approval process by both ACIP and CDC.
- **Finally**, the FDA and CDC continue to track outcomes from COVID-19 vaccines to ensure they are safe.

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

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Talk to your Primary Care Clinician or Vaccine Provider

The FDA fact sheets for the [Pfizer-BioNTech](#), [Moderna](#), and [Novavax](#) 2024-2025 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 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 OFFICIAL FOUNDATION OF
THE AMERICAN GERIATRICS SOCIETY

40 FULTON STREET
SUITE 809
NEW YORK, NY 10038
212.308.1414 TEL
Info@healthinaging.org

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. November 2024

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