



Key Facts About the COVID-19 Vaccine

Since early 2020, people around the world have been coping with COVID-19, the disease caused by the highly infectious SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes mild to severe respiratory illness. Cases of COVID-19 can be mild, but others can be more severe and occasionally deadly—especially for older adults or those living with chronic health conditions.

At this writing (December 21, 2020), vaccines developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna had been approved for use in the United States. Both vaccines were 94 percent effective for preventing COVID-19 and both have started shipping. The federal government is determining how the vaccines will be allocated across states. Here’s what you need to know about how a vaccine for COVID-19 will help protect you and your loved ones. The summary table below provides information about these two vaccines, with more detailed information following the table.

Approved COVID-19 Vaccines (as of 12/21/2020)

Vaccine Name	Vaccine Effectiveness	Dosing Information	Possible Side Effects
Pfizer-BioNTech	94%	2 doses, 21 days apart	Pain, swelling or redness at injection site, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain, chills, fever, nausea, swollen lymph nodes.
Moderna	94%	2 doses, 28 days apart	Pain, swelling at injection site, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain, chills, fever.

1 Safety has been key to the development and approval process of COVID-19 vaccines.

Tens of thousands of people have participated in carefully designed and controlled clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines to determine how safe and effective they are. Once proven safe and effective, the U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and independent, expert advisory boards review the clinical trial data to make sure that the data are correct. The FDA issues an approval only if the benefits of a vaccine outweigh its risks. In addition, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reviews all safety data before recommending any COVID-19 vaccine for use.

2 The COVID-19 vaccination will help prevent you from getting the virus.

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine will lower your risk of getting sick if you are exposed to the novel coronavirus. It is still possible that you may contract COVID-19 after receiving the vaccine, but extensive history with other vaccines suggests that getting vaccinated may also help you from getting seriously ill if you do get infected. Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines require two doses and it is very important to keep your second appointment to receive your second shot. This is how the vaccine was designed, and it’s what makes it most effective.

3 The short-term side effects of the COVID-19 vaccination are manageable.

When you get a vaccine, your arm may be sore, red, or warm to the touch, but these symptoms usually go away on their own within a week. In the trials, some people reported getting a headache, muscle aches, fatigue, or fever after getting a vaccine. These symptoms usually went away in a few days. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is doing exactly what it is supposed to do: working and building up protection to disease.

Before getting any vaccine, 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
- Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant
- Are breastfeeding
- Have received another COVID-19 vaccine

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

4 Getting vaccinated protects others.

Getting vaccinated yourself may help protect the people you're around, especially those who are at increased risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19, including older persons and those with chronic, underlying conditions.

5 The vaccine will be available at no cost to you, whether you have insurance or not.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced that any FDA-authorized vaccine will be covered under Medicare at no cost to beneficiaries. Medicaid and private health insurance are also required to cover all vaccine costs during this public health emergency, and people who are uninsured will be able to get free vaccines from their state or local health department or a community health center.

6 Updates on the vaccine's availability in your community are available from your state's health department.

CDC is recommending that states follow a phased approach to vaccination:

- **Phase 1A:** Healthcare personnel and nursing home residents.
- **Phase 1B:** Frontline essential workers (such as first responders, educators, and food and agriculture workers) and adults age 75 and older.
- **Phase 1C:** Other essential workers (transportation, housing, and finance workers), adults age 65-74, and people age 16-64 with high-risk medical conditions.

Based on initial estimates of vaccine availability, CDC anticipates that by the end of February 2021, 100 million Americans will have been vaccinated, and the agency currently projects that the vaccine will be available to other Americans starting in April. It is important to know that although the CDC has provided national guidance, each state is distributing vaccines according to its own priority plan. You are encouraged to check with your state health department about vaccine availability where you live.

7 Vaccines will eventually become widely available at pharmacies and federally qualified health centers across the country.

As vaccines become more and more available, you will be able to get the vaccine at large chain pharmacies, independent pharmacies, regional chain pharmacies, and federally qualified health centers, thanks to a U.S. government program. This program covers approximately 60 percent of all pharmacies (both independent and regional chains) throughout the 50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This will increase access to the vaccine across the country. Inclusion of the federally qualified health centers in the distribution network helps make sure that the vaccine reaches traditionally underserved areas.

8 Even with a vaccine available, it is still important to wear a mask and to physically distance.

Experts tell us that everyone must remain vigilant and continue to use all the tools available to us to help stop this pandemic. This includes wearing a mask over your nose and mouth, washing your hands often, and staying at least six feet away from others, even if you or they have received the vaccination. Experts will need to learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide before the CDC changes its recommendations for [how to protect yourself and others](#).