



# Key Facts About the COVID-19 Vaccines

**T**he best protection against COVID-19 is to be up to date with your vaccines. There are two steps to being up to date. The first is to get fully vaccinated. You are fully vaccinated when you have received the initial (first) series of shots. The second step is to get any additional shots that are recommended. Table 1 below gives a summary of recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about the COVID-19 vaccines (as of March 1, 2022).

**The vaccine is available at no cost to you.** This is true whether you have insurance or not. Any vaccine that is authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is covered under Medicare. So if you have Medicare, you will not have to pay to get vaccinated. Medicaid and private health insurance plans also cover all vaccine costs. Even if you are uninsured, you can get free vaccines.

**The COVID-19 vaccines are now available to everyone age five and older.**

Anyone who is eligible for a vaccine can get vaccinated. Vaccines are available at many locations. You can get a vaccine at most pharmacies, federally qualified or community health centers, or state or local health departments. See [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) for more information. You can also text your zip code to 438829 or call 1-800-232-0233 to find COVID-19 vaccine locations.

**Table 1: Approved COVID-19 Vaccines** (as of 3/1/2022)

Pfizer-BioNTech					
FDA Approval	Pfizer-BioNTech is fully authorized by the FDA for use in people ages 5 and older.				
Dosing Schedule	Age (years)	Initial Series*	3rd Shot (Booster)	4th Shot	Which Vaccines Can Be Used for the 3rd & 4th Shots
	<b>People who are NOT Immunocompromised</b>				
	5–11	2 doses, 21 days apart	None	None	None
	12–17		5 months after the second shot	None	Pfizer-BioNTech <b>only</b>
	18+		5 months after the second shot	None	Pfizer-BioNTech <b>or</b> Moderna
	<b>People who ARE Moderately or Severely Immunocompromised**</b>				
5–11	3 doses, Doses 1 & 2: 21 days apart	Considered part of initial series. At least 28 days after the 2nd shot	None	Pfizer-BioNTech <b>only</b>	
12+	2 doses, 21 days apart	At least 28 days after the second shot	At least 3 months after the third shot	Pfizer-BioNTech <b>or</b> Moderna	
Possible Side Effects	Pain, swelling or redness at injection site, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain, chills, fever, nausea, swollen lymph nodes.				
More Information	Visit the FDA website: <a href="https://www.fda.gov/media/153716/download">https://www.fda.gov/media/153716/download</a>				
Notes	<p>* It may be best for some people over 12 years old to receive the first two doses 8 weeks apart, especially males ages 12 to 39 years.</p> <p>** People who are immunocompromised or take medicine that affects the immune system are at higher risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19. The CDC has developed specific guidelines for immunocompromised people.</p>				

Moderna					
<b>FDA Approval</b>	Moderna is fully authorized by the FDA for use in people ages 18 and older.				
<b>Dosing Schedule</b>	Age (years)	Initial Series*	3rd Shot (Booster)	4th Shot	Which Vaccines Can Be Used for the 3rd & 4th Shots
	<b>People who are NOT Immunocompromised</b>				
	<b>18+</b>	2 doses, 28 days apart	5 months after the second shot	None	Pfizer-BioNTech <b>or</b> Moderna
	<b>People who ARE Moderately or Severely Immunocompromised**</b>				
<b>18+</b>	2 doses, 28 days apart	At least 28 days after the 2nd shot	At least 3 months after the third shot	Pfizer-BioNTech <b>or</b> Moderna	
<b>Possible Side Effects</b>	Pain, swelling or redness at injection site, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain, chills, fever, nausea, swollen lymph nodes.				
<b>More Information</b>	Visit the FDA website: <a href="https://www.fda.gov/media/144638/download">https://www.fda.gov/media/144638/download</a>				
<b>Notes</b>	<p>* It may be best for some people over 12 years old to receive the first two doses 8 weeks apart, especially males ages 12 to 39 years.</p> <p>** People who are immunocompromised or take medicine that affects the immune system are at higher risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19. The CDC has developed specific guidelines for immunocompromised people.</p>				

Johnson & Johnson/Janssen*					
<b>FDA Approval</b>	The J&J/Janssen vaccine has an emergency use authorization by the FDA for use in people ages 18 and older.				
<b>Dosing Schedule</b>	Age (years)	Initial Series*	2nd Shot	3rd Shot	Which Vaccines Should Be Used for 2nd & 3rd Shots
	<b>People who are NOT Immunocompromised</b>				
	<b>18+</b>	1 dose	At least 2 months after the first shot		Pfizer-BioNTech <b>or</b> Moderna
	<b>People who ARE Moderately or Severely Immunocompromised**</b>				
<b>18+</b>	2 doses	Considered part of initial series. At least 28 days after the first shot	At least 2 months after the 2nd shot	Pfizer-BioNTech <b>or</b> Moderna	
<b>Possible Side Effects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pain, swelling at injection site, fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain, chills, fever.</li> <li>■ The J&amp;J shot can increase the possibility of a blood clot due to a low platelet count. You should be on the lookout for symptoms for three weeks after getting the shot. <b>If you have any of these symptoms after getting the shot, seek medical attention immediately.</b> These include: Severe or persistent headaches or blurred vision; shortness of breath; chest pain; leg swelling; persistent abdominal pain; easy bruising or tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the injection site.</li> </ul>				
<b>Notes</b>	<p>* In April 2021, the Johnson &amp; Johnson vaccine was "paused." This was because of a rare side effect, called thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS). During the pause, the FDA and CDC evaluated how safe the vaccine is. They found that its benefits outweigh its risks. There were additional cases of TTS due to the Johnson &amp; Johnson vaccine after the pause. They included 8 deaths. There were only 2 cases of TTS and no deaths in person 65 years and older. The FDA added a warning that the Johnson &amp; Johnson vaccine should not be given to individuals who got TTS after getting the Johnson &amp; Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. In most situations, the CDC recommends people get the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines instead of the Johnson &amp; Johnson vaccine. This is for both the primary vaccine shots and any additional recommended shots.</p> <p>** If you are immunocompromised or take medicine that affects your immune system, you are at higher risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19. The CDC has developed specific guidelines for immunocompromised people.</p>				
<b>More Information</b>	Visit the FDA website: <a href="https://www.fda.gov/media/146305/download">https://www.fda.gov/media/146305/download</a>				

## Background

**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.

As of February 2022, the FDA has fully authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines. The FDA has provided emergency use authorization for the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen (J&J) vaccine.

The CDC currently prefers that people get an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna) over the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. This is because of safety issues with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The mRNA vaccines also show higher vaccine effectiveness compared to the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

**75% of all COVID-19 deaths in the United States have been among adults 65 years or older.**

## 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) vaccine.

## Staying up to date with the COVID-19 vaccination will help prevent you from getting the virus and will protect others.

**Being up to date with the COVID-19 vaccine means that you have been both fully vaccinated and received all recommended additional doses as recommended by the CDC (see Table 1).** 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. It also 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.

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.

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.



## Talk to your Primary Healthcare Provider

We recommend that you discuss the risks and benefits of getting vaccinated with your primary healthcare provider before getting the shots. The FDA fact sheets for the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines have more information.

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

**HEALTH IN AGING**  
FOUNDATION  
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. March 2022

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