

# COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs for Community Clinic Staff

*The answers in this FAQ were developed by the Federation of American Scientists with feedback from nonprofit health professionals and community clinics. FAQs will be updated as more is learned about the vaccine. Visit [www.coronavirusnetwork.org](http://www.coronavirusnetwork.org) for the latest.*

## **When will the vaccine be available to me?**

COVID-19 vaccines are expected to become available in December 2020, however as mass production of mass quantities takes time, there will only be limited doses at first. Therefore, healthcare workers and other groups most at risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19, such as nursing home residents, are likely to be first in line to receive vaccinations.

Who is prioritized for vaccination will be decided state-by-state. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will advise on who receives vaccines and in what priority, however, each state will ultimately make final decisions based on their state-specific plan. The decisions are shaped by a group of independent experts trying to ensure that the process is ethical, equitable, transparent and helps the greatest number of people.

If everything goes well, it is anticipated that the general public will start getting the vaccine by May or June 2021 although it is subject to change and could possibly be more like July or August.

## **How will we know that the vaccine is safe and protects you from COVID-19?**

Tens of thousands of people volunteered for what are called “clinical trials” to find out whether a vaccine is safe and effective at protecting people from COVID-19. These trials include people of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. The results of the trials are reviewed by independent experts, companies that are making the vaccine, and a federal government agency called the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Trials for the COVID-19 vaccine began earlier this year, and the reported results so far show they are around 90% effective, which is a very promising number. Vaccine safety gets assessed based on the experience of volunteers who received the vaccine during the trials. The thousands of volunteers are followed closely for at least two months to monitor their health

before the vaccine can be authorized for use. Any negative reactions to a vaccine would most likely happen within that period. The volunteers are also observed long-term to monitor for any other problems.

### **How did vaccine-makers create this vaccine so quickly, doesn't it usually take much longer?**

While vaccines do normally take longer, governments and companies all around the world have invested billions of dollars and worked with the top experts to get vaccines as soon as possible because so many people are at risk due to COVID-19.

There are a number of factors that helped them get it done so fast. First, COVID-19 is caused by a coronavirus, which is a type of virus. There are other types of coronaviruses in the world, and people were already working on vaccines for other coronaviruses which gave them a head start. Second, companies, governments and universities from every country worked together and used the most advanced technology on the development of this vaccine.

The most experienced people on vaccines in the world, with billions of dollars to aid them and millions of lives at stake have worked tirelessly to create the COVID-19 vaccine as quickly as possible. This all-in effort has resulted in not just one possible vaccine, but multiple candidates. At the same time, the vaccines are still put through trials and tests for safety and efficacy.

### **Wait, why are there different coronavirus vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZenca, Johnson & Johnson, etc.)? Don't we need just one? Is one better than the others?**

Different companies took different scientific approaches to developing the COVID-19 vaccine, which is good because taking multiple approaches increased the chance that at least one candidate would end up working. There are no guarantees for success at the beginning of a vaccine development process, so relying on just one would have been risky.

If multiple companies' COVID-19 vaccine candidates end up succeeding, that will be terrific, because there will be a greater supply of vaccines to give to people. There are some differences in the vaccines, such as how many doses you might need, how many days the doses are spaced apart, and the way the vaccine prompts your body to protect you against the virus. There may even end up being differences in effectiveness, which will be made public if the vaccines are cleared for use. However, they all serve the same purpose, to help stop you and others from getting COVID-19.

**How long does it take after getting a vaccine to be protected against the virus? After I get vaccinated can I stop wearing a mask and return to normal?**

Most of the COVID-19 vaccines, including those that will be available first, require two doses taken three or four weeks apart. It is estimated that an individual will be protected fourteen days, or two weeks, after receiving the second dose of vaccine. However, it is not yet clear if being vaccinated means you cannot still spread the virus to other people. Therefore, until the majority of people are vaccinated, it is likely we will need to continue wearing masks and taking other precautions.

**Will there be any side effects from the vaccine?**

The most common reactions to the vaccine based on the clinical trials will be soreness where the shot was given, which goes away quickly on its own. It is expected that for the vaccine there will be additional mild side effects that include muscle pain, fever, fatigue, headache, and joint pain. Severe side effects to vaccines are extremely rare. Minor side effects are a sign that your body is starting to build immunity (protection) against a disease.

**Why is fever a side effect of the vaccine, does that mean I am getting a form of COVID-19?**

Mild fever is a common side effect of many vaccinations, such as the flu vaccine which millions of people get every year. It does not mean you will have COVID-19. The vaccine essentially trains your body to recognize the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 and destroys it if you were to be exposed to it in everyday life. Since a fever is part of the way your body fights off a virus, a mild fever can be part of the body's training to fight off COVID-19.

**Do any of the new COVID-19 vaccines change my DNA?**

No, none of the vaccines that will be made available in the US to prevent the spread of COVID-19 will affect a person's DNA or genetic makeup. You may hear that two of the vaccines, one by Pfizer/BioNTech and the other by Moderna, use something called messenger RNA (mRNA), a small piece of the virus that won't make you sick, to protect people from getting COVID-19, but it does not change a person's DNA or alter their genetic make-up.

### **What if I have “antibodies,” does that mean I still need the vaccine?**

After vaccination your body will produce antibodies which protect you from getting COVID-19. In addition to those who are vaccinated, people who survived a case of COVID-19 may also have antibodies. However, we don't know how long antibodies against the coronavirus last. Also, current tests for antibodies are not necessarily reliable. Therefore, even if you had, or think you have had, COVID-19 already, you should still plan to get vaccinated.

### **Will the vaccine protect me from COVID-19 for life?**

Simply put, we do not know yet. Some vaccines protect you for a long period of time, others, like the flu vaccine, need to be taken every year. As the volunteers from the COVID-19 vaccine trials are monitored we will get more clarity on how long protection lasts.

### **How much will the vaccine cost?**

The federal government has promised the vaccine will be provided to people in the United States at no cost. Vaccination providers will be allowed to charge an administration fee for giving the vaccine shot to someone. Vaccine providers can get fees reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by a special government agency called the Health Resources and Services Administration.

### **At what point does the vaccine make the pandemic end?**

The vaccine will help us work towards ending the pandemic, which will be when enough people are protected from the virus that it can no longer spread. We still have many months until everyone gets vaccinated, and then we will still need to see how long the protection against the virus lasts. What that means is that even after you get vaccinated, it is not your “get out of COVID-19 free” card. The pandemic will end through action that includes the vaccine, but other important actions like everyone wearing masks, avoiding crowds, social distancing and practicing good hygiene.

### **Can a school / workplace make getting a vaccine mandatory?**

Mandatory vaccines are most commonly tied to public school attendance, and all 50 states require students to receive some vaccines, with exemptions for medical, religious, and philosophical reasons. Workplaces where there are increased risks of spreading the virus, such as a hospital or nursing home, may make the vaccine mandatory. Even in those cases there still

can be exemptions. We advise speaking with the workplaces and schools that are relevant to you to learn if they are considering requirements around COVID-19 vaccines.

### **I never get the flu shot, why should I get vaccinated for COVID-19?**

Even though most people who have COVID-19 do not die, the disease is still much more deadly than influenza, and is easily spread from one person to another - possibly to someone who is very vulnerable to the disease, and who will die.

We are also still learning about the long-term effects of COVID-19 in those who survive, and in many cases, long-term effects of COVID-19 appear to be substantial. Getting vaccinated protects you, your family, and your community from the consequences of COVID-19, including death.

When you get vaccinated, you help decrease the case rates of COVID-19 and end the pandemic. In this way, you are protecting loved ones and those who are most likely to die from COVID-19. Lastly, getting vaccinated helps our hospitals stay open to everyone needing care, since it reduces the number of COVID-19 patients seeking care at hospitals.

### **Tell me again, why should I trust vaccines from companies or the government?**

Having concerns about the vaccine is understandable. Remember though that tens of thousands of volunteers have received the COVID-19 vaccines. The government and vaccine companies are closely monitoring the trials and the findings are publicly available. As more and more people get the vaccines, it will continue to provide evidence that the vaccine can be trusted. Those that are vaccinated protect themselves against a possibly deadly disease.

### **I really don't trust the vaccine, what can I do instead?**

If you don't trust the vaccine right away, that can be understandable. If you want to avoid getting sick from COVID-19 you can still take a few easy steps. Wear a mask, especially when in any public indoor spaces, or if you will be socializing with people you don't live with. Because coronavirus-carrying virus particles can float and build up in the air, improving ventilation by doing things like opening windows is an important layer of protection. Better yet, go outside! Maintain social distance from those outside your household when possible, and washing your hands often is always a good idea!

Keep an open mind and continue to evaluate the data on the vaccine. We will continue to learn more about the vaccine as time goes on. Even though you are not comfortable right now, more information as people get vaccinated may help you feel better about it.

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This FAQ was written for the Coronavirus Support Network and Project Finish Line, initiatives of Sostento Inc. by the Federation of American Scientists, both US-based 501c3 federally recognized nonprofit organizations. Please note that the guidance in this document does not substitute for the recommendations of your healthcare provider.



This FAQ was published on December 3rd 2020. New versions will be released as additional information becomes available. For the latest version please visit [www.coronavirusnetwork.org](http://www.coronavirusnetwork.org)

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