COVID-19 Vaccine

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the status of COVID-19 vaccine availability in the US?

Of the multiple COVID-19 vaccines in development, there are a handful that are in the later phases of clinical trials and two that have been authorized to be administered in the United States. To help guide decisions about how to distribute the initial limited supplies of COVID-19 vaccines, the CDC and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices have published recommendations for which groups should be vaccinated first. Supplies will increase over time. The goal is for everyone to be able to easily get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as large quantities are available.

Once a vaccine is approved or authorized, when can I get vaccinated?

The initial doses that are distributed will be limited to those with the highest risk of infection, such as healthcare workers and residents of long-term care facilities, who are included in phase 1a of COVID-19 vaccine distribution. As manufacturing ramps up and more vaccine becomes available, public health officials will make recommendations for the vaccine to be prioritized for additional phases, such as essential workers (educators, utilities, law enforcement, etc.), as well as older adults and those with chronic medical conditions. The general public will probably not be able to access a vaccine until the spring of 2021.

If you believe that you may qualify for the early phases of prioritized vaccinations and have not yet received notice, you should contact your local department of health or your healthcare provider.

Can I get the vaccine at my wellness center?

Premise Health plans to procure and administer the COVID-19 vaccine in accordance with federal, state and manufacturer guidelines when it is made available. However, vaccine priority of distribution will be determined by state jurisdictions, and because of the national rollout plan, the early doses of the COVID-19 vaccine will only be available through large hospital systems and long-term care facilities.

Regardless of when the COVID-19 vaccine is available at your wellness center, we will still act as a valuable resource for guidance on the vaccine, as well as continued COVID-19 testing and support. Please visit our COVID-19 resource page at Members.PremiseHealth.com/Covid19 for more information and ways we can support you through the pandemic.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe?

Although the COVID-19 vaccines have gone through a faster development process than usual, the routine procedures are still in place to ensure safety and effectiveness. The FDA follows rigorous standards and will

only give emergency use authorization (EUA) if the vaccine candidates meet their qualifications. The FDA vaccine approval process typically takes 6 months or more of follow up study, whereas EUA only requires two months of monitoring trial participants to make sure there are no serious side effects associated with the vaccine. All other requirements for EUA are the same as full approval. The authorized vaccine, and those that are in the final phases of clinical trials, have thousands of participants with ~95% effectiveness and no known serious side effects.

Why were vaccine developers able to produce the COVID-19 vaccine so much faster than other vaccines?

Although the COVID-19 vaccine went through a faster than usual development process, that doesn't mean corners were cut. There was a worldwide effort to get vaccine research, production and distribution moving as quickly as possible and to remove any of the usual barriers to rolling it out. There was more collaboration amongst researchers, more funding and more research participants than usual to get accurate data on safety and efficacy back quicker than usual. No steps in the normal vaccine development were skipped or compromised.

I heard mRNA vaccines are new and haven't been fully tested. Are they safe?

While mRNA vaccines seem new, researchers have been studying them for decades. They were a favorable choice for the COVID-19 vaccine because they can be created in a lab using readily available materials, which means they can be developed faster than more traditional methods of making vaccines. Basically, rather than triggering an immune response with a weakened or inactive virus, the mRNA vaccines instead teach our bodies how to make a protein that triggers an immune response and helps produce antibodies to protect us from the virus.

Can mRNA vaccines change my DNA?

No, your DNA is inside your cells. MRNA never enters your cells and does not affect your genetic code.

I heard that the COVID-19 vaccine used cells taken from an aborted fetus. Is this true?

No. The Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines are made in a lab and do not use cells of any kind.

Were clinical trials only done on young, healthy people?

No. The first two mRNA vaccines in line for FDA authorization were tested in a diverse group of people. About 30% of U.S. participants were Hispanic, African American, Asian or Native American. About half were older adults. There were no significant safety concerns identified in these or any other groups.

What are the potential side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Some participants in the clinical trials reported temporary, mild to moderate side effects after receiving their vaccine. The side effects were fairly similar to that of the flu vaccine and included pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache, fever and aching muscles and joints for a day or two. There have been no serious side effects reported, and typically if someone is going to have a bad reaction to a vaccine it will

likely occur in the first six weeks after being administered.

These temporary, mild to moderate side effects are preferable to the alternative of getting COVID-19, so they should not deter you from receiving the vaccine. 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.

What about the allergic reactions caused by the COVID-19 vaccine?

Of the thousands of vaccine trial participants, there have been very few serious side effects reported. Some individuals have had allergic reactions to the vaccine, but it is extremely rare. As a precaution, you will be asked about any history of severe, life threatening allergic reactions prior to being vaccinated. Everyone who receives the vaccine will be required to wait 15 minutes after vaccination for observation and 30 minutes if you have a history of anaphylaxis to ensure you do not have an unexpected, adverse reaction to the vaccine. If you have a history of severe allergic reactions, and particularly to vaccines, ask your provider for further guidance on whether you should get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines in development all the same?

No, the vaccines are being developed by various companies and experts who are relying on different technologies, so the makeup of each will vary. This also changes how the vaccine needs to be stored, for how long, how many doses need to be administered, etc. However, all vaccine candidates will go through the same FDA authorization process to be deemed safe and effective before they reach the public.

Can I choose the vaccine that I get?

You likely will not be able to choose the vaccine you receive. It will depend on your local area and what is available there, based on what your state health department can order and distribute. It may also depend on what your local hospital or wellness center can accommodate.

One thing to remember, most vaccines are two doses. It is important that you receive the same vaccine for both your first and second dose to ensure maximum protection.

Why do I need two doses of the vaccine?

The vaccines that have been authorized and those that are in the final phases of development have shown very promising results and are highly effective at preventing COVID-19 infection. This protection is based on having two doses of the vaccine. It is not known if getting one dose will offer an acceptable level of protection.

Will I have to pay for the COVID-19 vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccine will be provided free of charge in the United States. However, providers can charge a fee for administering the shot to you. Your insurance will likely cover this added fee and there are public funds to cover fees for those without insurance, so cost should not be a barrier to getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

Will there be enough supply of the vaccine for everyone?

There will be limited supply of the COVID-19 vaccine at first, so not everyone will be able to get vaccinated right away. However, the federal government has already invested in select vaccine manufacturers so that they will be able to increase their supply and distribute authorized vaccines more quickly. High-risk populations will receive the vaccine first, followed by the general public.

Should everyone get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Studies on COVID-19 vaccine safety in children are still ongoing, so the CDC has not recommended those under the age of 16 get the vaccine at this time. Also, pregnant women and those who are immunocompromised can get the vaccine but should discuss with their healthcare provider first.

As of now, experts recommend that all other parts of the population should get the COVID-19 vaccine when it's made available, to help slow the spread and ultimately end the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are unsure, talk with your healthcare provider.

If I've already had COVID-19, do I need to get the vaccine?

Yes, people who have had COVID-19 already are eligible to receive the vaccine and should do so. Previous vaccine research shows that vaccine-related immunity is stronger than immunity from natural infection. The vaccine is also an important way to protect those around you, who may be high-risk, from getting the virus.

If I get the COVID-19 vaccine, can I still get the virus?

There is a chance you could still get COVID-19 after receiving the vaccine because no vaccine is 100% effective. The effectiveness of the authorized COVID-19 vaccines is over 94%, meaning that's how well they protect you from getting sick. So, you could potentially still get the virus, but you're much less likely to get it if you've had the vaccine.

Although you could still get the virus even after being vaccinated, the vaccine may prevent severe illness and long-term symptoms of COVID-19 if you get it. This is important, because even young survivors who were physically fit prior to getting COVID-19 have reported lingering symptoms months after infection. The long-term symptoms of COVID-19 can include fatigue, difficulty breathing, cough, joint pain, chest pain, cognitive impairment, depression, muscle pain, headache, fever and palpitations. More serious complications of COVID-19 can include myocardial inflammation, ventricular dysfunction, acute kidney injury, rash, alopecia, smell and taste dysfunction, sleep dysregulation, depression, anxiety and changes in mood.

Those who get the COVID-19 vaccine should still take other protections such as wearing a mask, social distancing, hand washing and more.

Can I stop wearing my mask and social distancing if I get the vaccine?

As of now, no. Health experts say that they will continue to advise wearing masks and social distancing until it is safe to resume

pre-pandemic conditions. We need all the tools available to stop the spread, which includes the vaccine and the protection tactics recommended by top health officials and the Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC). The best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19 will be getting vaccinated, while continuing to follow CDC guidelines like wearing a mask, staying 6 feet away from others, washing your hands often, etc.

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccine, reach out to your healthcare provider or check out: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/