

Questions and Answers about the COVID-19 Vaccine for Nursing Home Staff, Patients, Residents and Family Members

1. How are vaccines developed?

There are 4 phases of research. The vaccine must meet the highest levels of safety in each phase. After phase 3, the shot has been tested in tens of thousands of people. If there are no major side effects, it is approved as safe. This does not mean that side effects can't happen but that the scientists believe the risks are low and the benefit of receiving the shot is much larger. It is important to note this type of clinical trial has been used for decades to approve medications and vaccines.

2. How will we know it is safe?

In the clinical trials more than 30,000 people have taken the shot. Since early December 2020 more than a half a million people in the US have been vaccinated.

Most serious side effects occur within 6 weeks of the shot. We have been able to track side effects since the first clinical trial started in July 2020.

Safety is reviewed by doctors and researchers not involved in the clinical trials before the shot is approved.

3. What are some of the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine? Will the shot make me sick?

The vaccines can cause pain in the arm where you got the shot, or headache, or muscle pains, or feeling tired, or chills, or fever in some people. In the clinical trial people said these discomforts went away after a day, sometimes sooner. The 2nd shot is more likely to cause some side effects. This is normal, so don't be surprised.

If you experience discomfort after the first dose of the vaccine, it is very important that you still receive the second dose a few weeks later for the vaccine to be effective.

Side effects do not mean the vaccine gave you COVID-19. It means that the vaccine is causing your immune system to make antibodies to fight off the virus. **In other words, if you feel some discomfort, then the shot is doing its job!**

In some cases, a person may **already** be infected with COVID-19 when they get the vaccine but are not showing any signs. If they later have symptoms of COVID-19 or test positive for it, it **does not** mean they got COVID-19 from the vaccine.

4. The vaccine was developed so quickly, how do I know it was not rushed through?

The vaccines have been approved for emergency use to save lives during an urgent health crisis.

You may be anxious about the speed with which a vaccine has been approved. While the EUA is a shorter process, no steps are skipped in the safety evaluation process.

The FDA will continue to review the vaccines' benefits and risks as more people take the shot.

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5. I heard that mRNA is a new type of vaccine. Can it change my DNA? Since it is so new, how do we know it will work?

mRNA is not the same as DNA and your body will destroy it quickly after the shot. The mRNA tells your cells how to make a harmless protein that is unique to the virus. This protein cannot give you COVID-19. Our bodies recognize that the protein should not be there and build antibodies that remember how to fight the virus if we are infected in the future.

This is the first vaccine to use mRNA but it has been successfully used in cancer treatments.

For more information, visit the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/about-vaccines/how-they-work.html>

6. How long will the vaccine protect us?

We don't know the answer to this right now. It will take time and more research.

It might be like the flu shot where we have to take it every year. This also depends on how much the virus changes over time.

7. When will we be protected after we get the vaccine?

The vaccines require 2 shots spaced out a few weeks. Protection is usually 2 weeks after the second shot.

While no vaccine is 100% effective, the new shots are more than 94% effective.

8. What if I had COVID-19 or took a test that showed I have antibodies? Should I get the vaccine?

Yes, even if you have had COVID-19, it is safe to get the vaccine.

If you had a test that shows you have COVID-19 antibodies, you should still get the vaccine. It is safe and can increase your protection from future COVID-19 infections.

9. After I have had the second shot and it is 2 weeks later, do I still have to wear a mask?

Yes. Even though you got your shot, most people around you have not. We know the vaccine prevents disease in the vaccinated person, but it still may be possible to transmit the disease to others, until the vaccine is in widespread use.

Wearing a mask, social distancing, and practicing hand hygiene protects those who have not been vaccinated, especially our residents in long-term care.

10. Who will be able to get the vaccine in a nursing home?

CDC is recommending that nursing home residents and staff be among the first to get the vaccine. This includes anyone who works in a nursing home, including dietary and environmental services, not just those who perform direct patient care. Also staff who visit nursing homes, including doctors, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, medical directors, lab technicians and consultants.

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