

# COVID-19 Vaccine Patient FAQ



**Please note:** Due to the rapid pace of vaccine-related developments, information is being constantly updated. Please check back for more information. Please also refer to [Frequently Asked Questions | COVID-19 Vaccine \(ny.gov\)](#).

## **Young Children and Vaccines**

### **Is the vaccine safe for children under the age of 12?**

Yes. The vaccine is now available for children ages 5-11. The vaccine will boost a child's immune system against the COVID-19 virus. The vaccine is extremely effective at preventing children from getting the virus, and from becoming seriously ill or dying from COVID-19. The Pfizer vaccine has been granted emergency authorization use by the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) and the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

### **I don't want to get my child vaccinated right away. Why shouldn't I wait to see what happens with the 5-11 vaccines?**

The reason to get your child vaccinated as soon as possible is to protect them from the dangerous effects of COVID-19. The COVID-19 virus has caused many young children to be hospitalized and even to die. Vaccinating them against the virus is the best way to protect them from the virus. The vaccine reduces the chance of transmission (spreading) of the disease significantly. The vaccine also significantly reduces the chance of serious illness or death if your child does get COVID-19.

Receiving the vaccine as soon as possible ensures that your child can continue attending school, and not fall behind.

Finally, receiving the vaccine as soon as possible protects others in your family from receiving the vaccine, including especially older relatives or those with compromised immune systems.

### **Is the dosage for young children the same as adults? What about needle size?**

A lower dose and smaller needle is used for children ages 5-11 than for older groups.

### **Does the vaccine require 2 doses for the younger group?**

Yes. The Pfizer vaccine requires a second dose 3 weeks/21 days after the first dose.

### **Will Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines be available for children 5-11?**

Both the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are in testing and approval stages for this age group.

### **My child already had the COVID-19 virus. Do they still need to be vaccinated?**

Yes. Immunity to COVID-19 is stronger from the vaccine than from having the COVID-19 virus. Immunity to COVID-19 is also longer lasting. Even if your child had the vaccine, they should still be vaccinated.

### **I've heard that vaccines can cause inflammation in the heart in children. Is this true?**

A very small number of children have had inflammation in the middle layer of the heart wall (myocarditis) after receiving the vaccine. However, children are at much greater risk of this inflammation from the COVID-19 virus than from the vaccine. In addition, if a child has this inflammation after having the virus, they are at much greater risk of serious illness or even death.

But if a child has the inflammation after receiving the vaccine, the case is much more likely to be very mild, requiring only a short hospital stay and treatment with ibuprophen (Advil).

## **I still have questions about vaccinating my child. Can I speak to a doctor about my questions without making an appointment for the vaccine?**

Yes. Please schedule a consultation appointment. Sun River Health doctors are more than happy to discuss your concerns and answer your questions!

## **Boosters and Third Doses**

### **Who can get booster shots, and which vaccines are available?**

All over the age of 16 are now eligible for a COVID-19 booster vaccine. Sun River Health is now offering booster shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Janssen (J&J) COVID-19 vaccines.

Individuals aged 12 and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised are also eligible for a third dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, including those who:

- Are in active treatment for cancer
- Received an organ transplant and are taking medications to suppress the immune system
- Received a stem cell transplant within the last 2 years or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Have moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
- Have advanced or untreated HIV infection
- Are in active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids, cancer chemotherapy that causes severe immunosuppression, or other medications that may suppress immune response

**To schedule a booster shot, [click here](#), or call 844-400-1975.**

When you come in to receive your booster shot, be sure to bring your vaccination card!

### **Why do I need a booster shot?**

Many vaccines have a reduction in protection over time. The booster shot keeps your immunity to COVID-19 at the highest level.

### **Who needs a third dose, and is a third dose of the vaccine different from a booster?**

**Third doses** are different than boosters, and are available now for moderately to severely immunocompromised individuals.

Third doses are available 28 days after the second dose of Moderna or Pfizer for anyone who:

- Is receiving active cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood
- Received an organ transplant and are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Received a stem cell transplant within the last 2 years or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
- Advanced or untreated HIV infection (advanced defined as CD4 <200)
- Active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids (15-20mg/day of prednisone x 4 weeks or more) or other drugs that may suppress immune response. If this is you, please speak with your doctor about whether you should get a booster shot or third dose of the vaccine.

To schedule a third dose shot, or a consultation with a Sun River Health clinician, [click here](#), or call **844-400-1975**.

When you come in to receive your third dose, be sure to bring your vaccination card!

## **Vaccine Basics**

### **Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

The reason to get vaccinated is to boost your immune system from contracting COVID-19. All three available vaccines are extremely effective at preventing you from getting the virus, and from becoming seriously ill or dying from COVID-19. The vaccine, combined with social distancing and masking is the best way to fully move ourselves, our communities, and our nation beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has caused very serious illness and even death many in our country and around the world. If you get COVID-19, you also risk giving it to loved ones who may get very sick. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine is a safe choice to protect you and those in your home.

In addition, getting a COVID-19 is important to improve the health of your communities and the general population. When most of a population is immune to an infectious disease, this provides indirect protection, called “herd immunity,” to those who are not immune to the disease or who are unable to get vaccinated due to a compromised immune system or severe allergy to a specific vaccine ingredient. Scientists estimate that over 70% of the population will need to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity.

### **How do I know that the COVID-19 vaccination is real, safe, and reliable?**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has fully approved the Pfizer vaccine for the prevention of COVID-19 in people 16 and older, and it continues to be available under emergency use authorization for people 12 to 15 years old.

The Moderna and the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccines also continue to be available under emergency use authorization by the FDA to everyone ages 18 and up.

FDA approval, as well as FDA emergency use authorization, means that no shortcuts were taken in the research and clinical studies that were conducted. In fact, these vaccines went through the same FDA trials that other drugs go through, just on a faster track.

The COVID-19 vaccine was developed and tested in large clinical trials (tests) to make sure it meets safety standards established and enforced by FDA and endorsed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Many people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as those with different medical conditions, participated in these clinical trials. The FDA and CDC will continue to monitor the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine to make sure even very rare side effects are identified and made public.

*Several Sun River Health clinicians and other staff have given short interviews on why they believe the vaccine is important, viewable here:*



### **How were these vaccines developed so quickly?**

It is natural to have questions about the speed with which these vaccines were developed. In normal circumstances, vaccines take much longer to develop.

There are two areas that made the COVID-19 vaccine development different: one is that much of the research was already in place before the pandemic because since COVID-19 is part of a group of viruses that scientists had already spent a long time studying.

The other was the amount of cooperation, money, and effort that was shared around the globe in order to create the vaccine.

Scientists were not starting from scratch when they began work on the COVID-19 vaccine.

SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) is a member of the coronavirus family. There are hundreds of coronaviruses. Because scientists had already been studying coronaviruses before the pandemic, this meant they had existing data on the structure, genome, and life cycle of this type of virus before COVID-19 spread across the world.

In the midst of the global pandemic, researchers, scientists, and the medical community mobilized to share data and find solutions with more cooperation and shared effort and available funding than ever before.

In the U.S., [Operation Warp Speed \(OWS\)](#) partnered with multiple institutions, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to develop, manufacture, and distribute 300 million doses by early 2021.

A large amount of money was paid to the vaccine companies to start production immediately, so the vaccine supply was available once data showed that the vaccine worked.

Since the FDA approval, the vaccines have been given to millions of people around the globe, and continue to be considered safe and effective.

### **What does emergency use authorization mean? What's the difference between emergency use authorization and full authorization?**

Currently the Pfizer vaccine has received full FDA approval for children ages 12 and older. The two other vaccines, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, are available under FDA emergency use authorization.

#### **From the CDC COVID-19 FAQ:**

In certain types of emergencies, the FDA can issue an emergency use authorization, or EUA, to provide more timely access to critical medical products (including medicines and tests) that may help during the emergency when there are no adequate, approved, and available alternative options.

The EUA process is different than FDA approval, clearance, or licensing because the EUA standard may permit authorization based on significantly less data than would be required for approval, clearance, or licensing by the FDA. This enables the FDA to authorize the emergency use of medical products that meet the criteria within weeks rather than months to years.

EUAs are in effect until the emergency declaration ends but can be revised or revoked as we evaluate the needs during the emergency and new data on the product's safety and effectiveness, or as products meet the criteria to become approved, cleared, or licensed by the FDA.

### **Did the vaccine studies include people of diverse races and ethnicities?**

Yes. Many people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as those with different medical conditions, participated in these clinical trials.

### **Can the vaccine cause COVID-19?**

No. None of the vaccines currently available use the live virus that causes COVID-19.

After receiving the vaccine, you may experience a headache, fever, or other flu-like symptoms. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is doing exactly what it is supposed to do and usually go away within 1-2 days. Taking Ibuprofen or Tylenol can also help with these symptoms.

### **Is it true that the vaccine could change or have a negative effect my DNA?**

This is incorrect. COVID-19 vaccines do not get incorporated into your DNA. COVID-19 vaccines do not change or interact with your DNA in any way.

### **What are the differences between the vaccines?**

The Pfizer and Moderna Vaccines are mRNA vaccines, while the Johnson & Johnson vaccine uses more traditional virus-based technology. The main difference is the way that instructions are delivered to your cells to help them respond to the virus.

The mRNA vaccines essentially deliver a small piece of code to your cells, which serves as an instruction manual to teach your immune system to recognize and destroy the virus that causes COVID-19.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine uses material delivered in a common cold virus called an adenovirus to send these instructions. The adenovirus has been disabled so it doesn't replicate itself or make people sick.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are given in two doses and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is given in one dose.

### **Is the Johnson & Johnson Vaccine safe?**

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has been administered to millions of people around the world, and is extremely safe.

The administration of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was temporarily put on hold after the vaccine caused blood clots in six out of 6.8 million females ages 18 through 49 years. This is .00008%, or less than one in six million. Symptoms developed approximately one to two-weeks following vaccination.

The FDA has removed its pause, and instead recommends that women younger than 50 be made aware of the rare complication.

There has been a noticed increased risk of Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) after administration of the vaccine. Based on an analysis of data from the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), there have been 100 preliminary reports nationwide of GBS following vaccination with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine after approximately 12.5 million doses administered. Although the available evidence suggests an increased risk of GBS after vaccination with J&J vaccine, there is not enough evidence to establish a direct relationship.

The CDC and the FDA continue to monitor individuals who receive the vaccines to ensure there's no evidence of even rare safety issues. People who have previously had Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS) and Bell's Palsy GBS may receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

### **Can I choose which of the three vaccines I want to receive?**

Yes. At Sun River Health and some other health care facilities, you can choose any of the three available vaccines.

Currently the Pfizer vaccine has received full FDA approval. The two other vaccines, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, are available under FDA emergency use authorization.

The Johnson and Johnson vaccine only requires one shot. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines both require two shots.

### **How do the vaccines work?**

The COVID-19 vaccine teaches your body to recognize the virus and protect you from getting the infection. Vaccines work by triggering your immune system to recognize and fight off the viruses they target. By triggering your immune system to respond to a virus, the vaccine helps your body destroy the virus if you are exposed to COVID-19 in the future. All three available vaccines are extremely effective at preventing serious illness, hospitalization, and death.

Vaccination requires one or two doses, depending on the type of vaccine you receive. It is important to take the full recommended dosage.

After you get vaccinated, your body may start experiencing some signs and symptoms that are caused by the vaccine. These are called side effects. Side effects after vaccination are normal and may not happen to everyone who gets the vaccine. These side effects usually do not interfere with what you do every day and may include:

- Arm pain or soreness near the vaccination site
- Mild fever that does not last for a long period of time
- Feeling cold and/or tired

For a detailed graphic on how the vaccine works, [click here](#).

### **What happens to mRNA after the protein is made? Does it stay in my body?**

The mRNA has a short lifespan and decomposes very rapidly.

### **Can you share data on how well the vaccine works?**

All three available vaccines are extremely effective in preventing hospitalization or death from COVID-19, most likely over 95%. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are approximately 52% effective two weeks after the first dose, and 94% effective two weeks after the second dose. Johnson & Johnson is approximately 72% effective two weeks after receiving the only needed dose.

Herd immunity is variable and depends on the virus, the population, and the strain. Currently, our understanding is that 70% of the population needs to be vaccinated for herd immunity from this virus, though this may change as more data is reviewed. The recommendation is that everyone eligible should be vaccinated.

### **What if I have already had COVID-19, do I still need to be vaccinated?**

Yes, vaccination is still important even if you had COVID-19. Reinfection with COVID-19 is possible. Experts do not know how long immunity will last after a COVID-19 infection, so it is recommended to be vaccinated even if you had COVID-19.

Vaccination is a critical part of our public health response to ending the pandemic. Right now, the data suggest that protection after natural infection may only last 2-3 months in some people. Current data from the vaccine tests also suggests that immunity from the vaccine immunity is stronger and longer lasting.

The only time you should delay vaccination for more than 90 days after having COVID-19 is when you received something called “monoclonal antibodies.” This is a medication given to you that goes directly into your vein with a needle attached to a tube and medication bag.

### **What about new variants of COVID-19, including the delta variant? Does the vaccine work against them?**

All three vaccines are extremely effective at protecting you from serious illness, hospitalization, and death from the delta variant. Viruses are always changing and evolving, and vaccines are designed to account for these changes. At present, scientists believe the vaccine will be effective against new variants of COVID-19. There is currently no evidence that any new variants will impact the effectiveness of the vaccines being distributed now.

### **Do the COVID-19 vaccines that are being used contain any pig fat or pork products?**

No. While some vaccines have used pork gelatin to stabilize the other ingredients, the mRNA Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines were not developed using any pork products. Jewish and Muslim authorities have encouraged full participation in receiving COVID-19 vaccines.

### **What about COVID-19 vaccine booster shots?**

A booster shot is another dose of the vaccine that is given to someone who has built enough protection after vaccination, but then that protection decreases over time.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has issued recommendations for a single booster shot of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at least six months after getting their second Pfizer vaccine dose for the following groups:

- Individuals 65 years of age and older, and residents in long-term care settings
- Individuals 50 to 64 years of age with underlying medical conditions
- Individuals 18 to 49 years of age with underlying medical conditions, based on individual benefits and risks
- Individuals 18 to 64 years of age who are at increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission because of occupational or institutional setting, based on individual benefits and risks

Children aged 12 to 17 and individuals who received the Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccines are also not eligible for a booster COVID-19 vaccine at this time.

### **Can some people receive a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Sometimes, people who are immunocompromised do not build enough (or any) protection when they first get a vaccine. The FDA and CDC have authorized the use of a third dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) for people 12 or older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised people, including those who:

1. Are in active treatment for cancer
2. Received an organ transplant and are taking medications to suppress the immune system
3. Received a stem cell transplant within the last two years, or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
4. Have moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome or Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
5. Have advanced or untreated HIV infection
6. Are in active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids, cancer chemotherapy that causes severe immunosuppression, or other medications that may suppress immune response

The third dose should be the same type of vaccine as the first two whenever possible. At this time, additional doses are not authorized for immunocompromised people who received the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.

Talk to your doctor about your medical condition to determine if a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is right for you.

### **What side effects will I experience from the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Most people do not have serious problems after being vaccinated. However, your arm may be sore, red, or warm to the

touch right after. Some people report getting a headache, fever, or other flu-like symptoms after getting the vaccine. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is doing exactly what it is supposed to do and usually go away within 1-2 days. Taking Ibuprofen or Tylenol can also help with these symptoms.

### **Will I have to pay to receive the vaccine, or is it free?**

At this time, all COVID-19 vaccinations in the U.S. will be at no cost to patients.

### **When can my family and I receive the vaccine?**

At this time, everyone aged 16 and up can make an appointment to get the COVID-19 vaccine in New York State. The Pfizer vaccine continues to be available under emergency use authorization for people 12 to 15 years old as well.

If you do not have health insurance, there will be no charge if your only reason for coming into the health center is to receive the vaccine. If you are uninsured and are coming in for another reason but ask to get the vaccine as part your visit, you will be charged for your visit according to our sliding fee scale.

### **After I receive a vaccination, do I still need to wear a mask and avoid close contact with others?**

Yes, it is important for everyone to continue to follow the CDC's recommendations of covering their mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often, and staying at least six feet away from others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following these recommendations offer the best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19.

### **What allergic reactions to the vaccine have been identified?**

The only allergic reaction identified to the vaccine at this time are people with a history of anaphylaxis. Vaccine providers will observe patients after vaccination to monitor for the occurrence of immediate adverse reactions. People with a history of anaphylaxis will be observed for 30 minutes following administration of the vaccines. Everyone else will be observed for 15 minutes following administration of vaccines.

For more information from the CDC on allergic reactions, [click here](#).

### **Will I be able to get the COVID-19 vaccine if I am sick or not feeling well?**

If you are sick or not feeling well, you will not be eligible to receive the vaccine. Please consult your doctor if you have additional questions.

### **Is there anyone who should not receive the vaccine?**

Before you are vaccinated, you will be evaluated to see if there are reasons you should not receive the vaccine.

### **Do I really need to receive more than one dose of the vaccine, if I receive the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines?**

Yes. Receiving both doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines is the best way to protect yourself from COVID-19. The second Pfizer dose is given 21 days after the first dose. The second Moderna dose is given 28 days after the first dose.

Your appointment for your second dose will be given when you receive your first vaccination. If you miss your second dose, you should call your doctor to discuss what you should do.

If you receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, you only need one dose.

### **If I get the COVID-19 vaccine, do I still need to get a flu shot?**

Yes, it is extremely important that you get your regular flu shot as well. You should continue to receive all other vaccines to stay healthy and prevent the spread of illness.

### **How long will my COVID-19 immunity last after I get my vaccination?**

It is unknown how long immunity will last at this time. It is important to continue wearing a mask and social distancing until further notice, even after you are vaccinated.

### **Can side effects from the vaccine occur not until the day after someone gets it?**

Side effects are minimal, with most people noticing slight pain and swelling at the site of injection, slight headache, low grade fever, and muscle aches. These all usually occur within 24 hours of getting the vaccine.

### **I have had to use a nebulizer over the last a few days due to asthma. Can I still get the vaccine?**

Yes.

**If you take the vaccine, can you still spread COVID-19 if you are exposed, even if you don't show symptoms or test positive?**

There is some evidence that the virus can still be carried by a vaccinated individual. Even though the virus will not make them sick, that person may transmit it to unvaccinated people. Vaccinated people should continue social distancing and wearing masks to reduce this risk.

**Is the vaccine recommended to children under the age of 12?**

No, not currently. Emergency use authorization for younger children is expected near the end of 2021. This vaccine will be available for young children ages 5-11. But several steps need to be taken first, including the completion of clinical trials.

**Is there a risk of running out of the vaccine supply to get the second dose, or is it guaranteed if the first dose was given?**

At this time, everyone who receives a first dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine will receive an appointment to get their second dose.

**Does the vaccine interfere with mental health medications?**

We don't believe so, but no formal studies have been done yet.

**Does actively using drugs and or drinking affect the vaccine?**

There is no reason to believe that these activities result in any different response to the vaccine.

**Is there any information on Bell's Palsy side effects from the vaccine?**

This is extremely rare. Bell's Palsy side effects are more common due to other causes, such as HSV or Lyme disease.

**Is it recommended to check immunity after the completion of the second dose of the vaccine to ensure there are antibodies?**

Currently, this is not recommended, because most labs do not show a level of immunity. Instead, they only show if antibodies are present or absent.

