

COVID-19 Vaccine

Answering questions from Older Adults

The purpose of this document is to provide VALUE Peer Ambassadors, Community Organizations and faith leaders with a resource to answer questions frequently asked by older adults. Selected content may also be used to create outward facing materials. Please do not try to answer any questions that go beyond your basic knowledge. For further questions, you can state you are not a medical professional ask them to consult their own medical professional and that the this is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Recommendations are changing frequently, always refer to the CDC guidance or your physician for new and routine updates.



It's Baltimore versus COVID. Let's win this together.

To learn more, visit coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov/covax



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Updated Mar 08, 2021
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COVID-19 Vaccine

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HOW DOES THE COVID-19 VACCINE WORK?

What is a vaccine?

Vaccines help your body fight viruses by making protective proteins called antibodies. These antibodies fight common germs, such as if you have a cold in the winter. Since COVID-19 is new, the vaccines help our bodies build antibodies that attack the virus, then if you're exposed to COVID-19 your antibodies will help fight it. This helps protect you from getting very sick from COVID-19. The COVID-19 vaccine doesn't carry a live virus, so you can't get sick from it.

Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccine will keep most people from getting very sick with COVID-19. COVID-19 can cause severe medical issues, especially for people who have other medical problems. COVID-19 can also lead to death at a higher rate for those who are older. The vaccine helps prevent people from getting very sick from the virus.

If I get vaccinated, will it help to protect others?

Getting vaccinated protects your community in the long run. We still don't know how well the vaccine will work to prevent COVID-19 from spreading. For now, please keep wearing masks and stay at least 6 feet away from others after you get the vaccine. Even if you have had your vaccine, you can still be exposed to the virus. Even if you don't get sick, you might still be able to spread the virus to others. If enough people are vaccinated, the virus cannot easily spread and infect people. That is when our community will be protected by "herd immunity."

Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I'm social distancing?

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Wearing masks and social distancing helps to reduce your chance of being exposed to or spreading the COVID-19 virus. But, you also need to get vaccinated in order to help make your body ready to fight the virus if you are exposed.

Will an influenza (flu) vaccine protect me from COVID-19?

No. Getting a flu shot does not protect you from COVID-19, but you will be less likely to get the flu, and less likely to be hospitalized if you get it.

VACCINE SAFETY & SIDE EFFECTS

Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?

None of the vaccines currently available are “live” vaccines and you cannot get sick with COVID-19 from the vaccines.

No. The mRNA vaccines made by Moderna and Pfizer do not have the COVID-19 virus in it. They are made out of mRNA, a molecule that talks to your body and tells your body to produce a harmless version of the coronavirus “spike” protein. Your body then recognizes the harmless proteins and makes antibodies to fight the COVID-19 virus later. The vaccine CANNOT make you sick with COVID-19.

No. The Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine does not have COVID-19 virus in it. It uses a different type of harmless common cold virus that talks to your body and tells your body to produce a harmless version of the coronavirus “spike” protein. Your body then recognizes the harmless proteins and makes antibodies to fight the COVID-19 virus later. You CANNOT get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

How could the vaccines be made so quickly and still be safe?

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COVID-19 is a global emergency. Scientists, drug companies and government all worked together to make a vaccine as fast and as safe as possible. Scientists got extra money to develop the vaccine quickly but did not skip the steps to make a safe and effective vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccines went through testing and safety checks like any other vaccine, and on average thirty to forty-thousand people participated in each clinical trial before the vaccines were approved. The FDA has deemed the vaccines safe for emergency use.

Safety continues to be monitored in the people that have received the vaccine in the US and we now know that nearly 88 million doses of the vaccines have been given in the US as of March 6th, 2021

How do I know the COVID-19 vaccine is safe for the long term?

The drug companies, the CDC, and the FDA keep checking on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines. This involves checking how people react to the vaccine. You can get a smartphone app called “V-SAFE” once your vaccination is done so you can record side effects, if you get any. You can also get a reminder for your second dose if you get a two-dose vaccine. If there are any serious problems, the CDC will call you to make sure you get the care you need. You should always call your doctor if you're concerned.

Can I get vaccinated if I'm allergic to eggs?

Yes, you can have an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine even if you have a history of an extreme allergic reaction (anaphylactic shock) to other things such as foods including eggs, pets, venom, environmental or latex allergies.

Make sure to share your medical history with the person giving you the vaccine. If you have a severe allergic reaction to a COVID-19 vaccination, please call 911 right away.

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Who should not get the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines?

- If you are allergic to polyethylene glycol (PEG) or polysorbate do not get a COVID-19 vaccine, before discussing it with your doctor.
- If you have had a severe or immediate reaction (within 4 hours) to other vaccines or injectable therapy (injections) for another disease, ask your doctor if you should get a COVID-19 vaccine.
- If you have had a severe or immediate allergic reaction to any ingredient in a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine you should not get either of the available mRNA COVID-19 vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna).
 - The ingredients in the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine are: mRNA, lipids ((4-hydroxybutyl)azanediyl)bis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis(2-hexyldecanoate), 2 [(polyethylene glycol)-2000]-N,N-ditetradecylacetamide, 1,2-Distearoyl-sn-glycero-3- phosphocholine, and cholesterol), potassium chloride, monobasic potassium phosphate, sodium chloride, dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate, and sucrose.
 - The ingredients in the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine are: messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA), lipids (SM-102, polyethylene glycol [PEG] 2000 dimyristoyl glycerol [DMG], cholesterol, and 1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine [DSPC]), tromethamine, tromethamine hydrochloride, acetic acid, sodium acetate, and sucrose.

After you get the shot, medical staff will monitor you for the next 15 minutes to make sure you are okay. If you have had an allergic reaction previously you may be watched for 30 minutes after your vaccination. Reactions to the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are rare, but if you get one, they will respond right away.

Who should not get the J&J COVID-19 vaccine?

You should not get the J&J COVID-19 vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction or an immediate allergic reaction – even if it was not severe to any of the ingredients in the vaccine (such as polysorbate).

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- The ingredients in the J&J COVID-19 vaccine are: recombinant, replication-incompetent adenovirus type 26 expressing the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein, citric acid monohydrate, trisodium citrate dihydrate, ethanol, 2-hydroxypropyl- β -cyclodextrin (HBCD), polysorbate-80, sodium chloride.

You may still be able to get mRNA vaccine, but you should discuss it with your doctor ahead of time.

Can I get vaccinated if I have a serious medical problem (“comorbidity”) like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, kidney disease, or chronic lung disease?

Yes, if you have a comorbidity, such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, kidney disease, chronic lung disease, you can and should get your COVID-19 vaccine. During testing, many people in the vaccine studies had other medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, kidney disease, and chronic lung disease and safely received the vaccine. These conditions can make you very sick or even die if you get COVID-19, so it's best to get the vaccine as soon as possible.

If you have a low immune system (immunocompromised) due to cancer, HIV or other medications you may still be able to get the vaccine but should talk to your doctor first.

If you are on a blood thinner or have a bleeding disorder, talk with your doctor first before getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

If you have an autoimmune condition, you can get a COVID-19 vaccine but there are no safety data, so you should talk with your doctor first.

VACCINE EFFECTIVENESS

How long does it take for a COVID-19 vaccine to work?

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It will take 2 weeks after your second or final dose of COVID-19 vaccine before you are fully protected. Even after you are vaccinated, you should continue to take precautions in public places.

Do I need to get vaccinated if I already had COVID-19?

Yes, you should still get the vaccine but wait until after you are feeling better and are no longer quarantining. You might get some protection after having the infection, called natural immunity, but we don't know yet how long your natural immunity will last or how strong it will be. We also don't yet know how long the protection you get from a COVID-vaccine will last but are watching it closely.

Do I need to get both doses of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine or am I protected from COVID-19 after getting 1 dose?

Yes, you need to get both shots of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine to get the full protection from COVID-19. It takes until at least 2 weeks after the second vaccine to get the full protection. The current mRNA COVID-19 vaccines in the US require 2 shots. When you get your first shot, you can schedule your second shot while you are still at the vaccination site.

If you get the J&J COVID-19 vaccine, it is currently authorized for one dose (shot) by the FDA. The protection begins around two weeks but you don't get full protection until 28 days after the shot.

The FDA and drug companies will be monitoring all the vaccines closely to see if additional boosters or shots are needed.

How long will I be protected after getting vaccinated?

We still don't know how long antibodies last after COVID-19 infection or whether they'll protect you. We will learn more as scientists continue to study vaccine trials and regular vaccinations.

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Will the COVID-19 vaccine work against the new variants of the virus?

Researchers are watching new strains closely to decide if any changes need to be made to the vaccine. In order to lower the risk of more strains developing, we need to get as many people vaccinated as soon as possible to lower the impact of COVID-19 on our community.

ABOUT THE VACCINES

What is the difference between the vaccines?

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are mRNA vaccines and the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine is a viral vector vaccine. They are safe and effective for older adults of many races and ethnicities, as well as for people with many other medical conditions. You should take whichever vaccination you're offered. Studies show that there's no real difference between available mRNA COVID-19 vaccines. Although the efficacy of the J&J COVID-19 vaccine is lower overall, the vaccine is a single dose and provides excellent protection against hospitalization and death from COVID-19.

The mRNA vaccines and viral vector vaccine were tested at different times and different strains were circulating at the time the vaccines were tested so efficacy cannot be compared, but it is important to emphasize that ALL available vaccines provide excellent protection against hospitalization and death from COVID-19. The best vaccine is the one you can get!

Is there a difference in how effective each vaccine may be for older adults?

All of the vaccines help prevent severe disease, hospitalizations and death. We are recommending that all older adults are vaccinated as soon as possible with

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available vaccines and will be watching closely to determine if a booster dose may be necessary in the future.

Can you mix and match vaccines from different manufacturers?

Don't mix and match vaccines from different manufacturers. If your vaccine has two doses, make sure that your first and second dose are from the same brand. It is not recommended to get two different types of COVID-19 vaccines at this time.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT AFTER GETTING VACCINATED?

How will I feel after getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

Like all medicines, vaccines have side effects. Most side effects are mild to moderate and go away after a few days. Some people don't have any side effects after getting the vaccine, but some people get a little sick afterward. This is called an "immune response" and it can happen as your body builds protection against the virus. This is not the same as getting sick from COVID-19. The vaccines cannot give you COVID-19.

The most common side effects are pain in your arm where you got your shot, feeling tired, headache, muscle pain, fever and chills. Arm pain is common the next day and usually goes away after a day or two. If you have severe symptoms always call your doctor.

Remember that the side effects of the vaccine are much less serious than getting sick with COVID-19. Many people reported more side effects after the second dose. In general, older adults have fewer side effects than younger adults.

Solutions for possible side effects from getting the vaccine:

To help reduce pain or discomfort from where you got the shot-

- Apply a clean, cool, wet washcloth over the area.

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- Use or exercise your arm.
- Take a pain reliever, like Advil or Tylenol (if able).

To reduce discomfort from fever-

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Take medicine to reduce fever, like Advil or Tylenol (if able).

When to contact your doctor or healthcare provider-

- If the redness or tenderness where you got the shot increases after 24 hours.
- If the side effects are really bad (severe) or do not go away after a few days.
- If you get an unexpected side effect.

If I get the vaccine, do I still have to wear a mask and practice social distancing?

People who have been fully vaccinated can start doing some things they had stopped doing because of the pandemic, but you should keep taking precautions in public places like wearing a mask, staying 6 feet apart from others, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces until we know more.

I was already vaccinated; do I still need to isolate or quarantine if I am exposed or have symptoms of COVID-19?

The quarantine guidelines are constantly changing. You should follow the current CDC guidance about quarantine and isolation. The CDC closely follows scientists and updates their recommendations accordingly.

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HOW DO I GET THE VACCINE?

You are a high priority! Many older adults are at a high risk of getting COVID-19 because the virus spreads quickly between neighbors. Older adults living in long-term care facilities, assisted living and senior housing are high-priority group to get a COVID-19 vaccine and some vaccines are being offered directly in the buildings.

Where can I get vaccinated?

The City is offering more vaccine locations every week, including organizing clinics in your community. This includes clinics that may be directly set up in your building where you live. You will be contacted directly with more information.

Vaccination clinics are also being set up at local churches and you should receive a flyer about clinics in your community. As more community clinics become available, we will work with community leaders to make you aware of what you need to do to get a vaccine. The City is working hard to reach adults at highest risk directly, but this will take time, particularly as the vaccine is still in short supply.

In addition to the clinics brought directly to senior buildings, you may also make an appointment through the following places:

Baltimore City: Older adults aged 65+ can complete [the vaccine interest form](#) online. If you do not have internet access, call Maryland Access Point at 410-396-CARE (2273) to get help registering for the vaccine

For all Maryland locations to get the vaccine: coronavirus.maryland.gov and click on "Find a Vaccine"

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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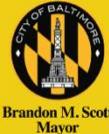
Where can I find out more about the COVID-19 vaccine?

- Baltimore City Health Department: [Baltimore City Health Department COVID-19 Vaccine Information](#)
- Maryland's COVID Distribution: [COVIDLINK](#)
- Maryland Department of Health: COVID Vaccine [FAQs](#)
- The Center for Disease Control (CDC): [COVID-19 Vaccines](#)



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