



Frequently Asked Questions about the COVID-19 Vaccine

What is It?

What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccine takes a genetic piece of the virus and uses it to trigger an immune response in your body. Since there is not any actual live virus in the vaccine, you cannot get an infection, but the vaccine will allow the body to react to it as if it was an infection. After receiving the vaccine, you may get some symptoms, but it's really your body's immune system reacting and not an actual infection. Once your body goes through this process, if it encounters an actual virus, it already knows how to kill it, and you will not get infected or if you do, you would have a mild case and not the severe cases that lead to hospitalization and even death.

Is it Safe and Effective?

Is it safe?

The research shows that the vaccine is safe. The normal steps taken to study any vaccine were taken to study the COVID-19 vaccine. In fact, there were more patients studied in this trial than have been in other vaccine trials for vaccines that we use all the time. Of note, there is always a chance that there will be an unknown reaction that will take place in a very small number of patients (e.g., 1 in 100,000 patients). This is why there will be ongoing data collection after the vaccine is released. Most of the time, the reaction period is within 2 months, which is why the FDA required 2 months of safety data to be reviewed before approving the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the vaccine.

How was this vaccine approved?

The vaccine was studied in clinical trials similar to other vaccines that we currently use. Once the trial is completed, a review of the data for both efficacy and side effects is reviewed. Since the vaccine demonstrated that it was effective and did not cause any serious side effects, it was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to be released through an EUA.

Is the vaccine effective?

Yes. In the trial, it was shown to be 95% effective in preventing patients from getting sick from COVID-19. This is considered highly effective since, by comparison, influenza (flu) vaccine is roughly 50% effective and a measles vaccine is around 93% effective after the first dose and 97% after the second.

Does the vaccine have any preservatives?

No. The vaccine we are using, from Pfizer, does not contain any preservatives. It is highly unstable, which is why it requires ultra-cold freezers to store it at -70C (-90F).

Can the vaccine alter my RNA?

No, this is a false claim that has appeared on social media. The vaccine uses messenger RNA (mRNA) to give your body instructions on how to make the proteins that are on the surface of COVID-19. Once made, your body then learns how to make the antibodies against the virus if you encounter it in the future. The mRNA cannot and does not get incorporated into or change your own DNA.

Should I Get the Vaccine?

Why should I get the vaccine now?

We are in the middle of a severe pandemic. The only way to really slow down or stop the transmission is for a large enough group of people to become immune to the virus. This can only be achieved by getting the actual infection **OR** getting the vaccine.

If I had a COVID-19 infection, do I still need to get the vaccine?

There will be guidelines issued for this circumstance. We will follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines on this. However, at this time, we expect that it will not be recommended if you had a documented case of COVID-19 infection within the past 90 days.

Can I get the vaccine if I have an egg allergy?

Yes. The vaccine that we will be using, from Pfizer, uses mRNA to give your body instructions on how to make proteins that are on the surface of COVID-19, instead of using a live or weakened virus. Since there is no live virus or eggs used in its production, the vaccine is safe to use in patients who have an egg allergy.

Can I get the vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

It is unclear at this time. The data is not available to make a determination if it is safe or unsafe to administer the COVID-19 vaccine to a pregnant or breastfeeding patient. At this time, the recommendation would be to check with your doctor before making a decision. As more data is released about the vaccine and pregnancy, that recommendation may change.

Additional Questions about Vaccination

How is the COVID-19 vaccine administered?

The vaccination is given as an intramuscular (IM) injection. A similar injection would be the tetanus or flu vaccines, which are also given IM. The COVID-19 vaccine that is currently available will require a booster (second) dose given 21 days after the first dose.

If I receive a dose of one vaccine can I use a different COVID-19 vaccine for the second dose?

No, once you start with a particular vaccine, you need to get the booster dose of the same vaccine.

What are typical reactions to the vaccine?

The most common reaction is pain at the injection site, which occurs in about 80% of patients. In the study of 43,000 patients, other common symptoms fatigue (>60%), headache (>50%), muscle pain (>30%), chills (>30%), joint pain (>20%) and fever (>10%). While the symptoms

were uncomfortable, and at times intense, the participants said they often went away after a day. The symptoms seem to be more severe with the second dose but it remains important to get the second dose in order to obtain the immunity repose to protect you from the actual infection. It is important to understand that these are expected reactions from stimulating your immune system and not an actual COVID-19 infection.

Where can I go if I have additional questions?

The Will County Health Department has a comprehensive [COVID-19 Vaccine](#) section on their website. In addition, they offer a [COVID-19 hotline](#) that's staffed Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 815-740-8977.