COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs

Indiana Department of Health

Is the vaccine safe? Why should I get it?
All steps have been taken to ensure that vaccines are safe and effective for people ages 5 years and older. Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 can lower your risk of getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19 and help prevent severe illness, hospitalization and death. The side effects of the vaccine are generally mild, including fatigue, headache and sometimes fever for a day or two.

While the COVID-19 vaccine is new, the science used to create it is not. The COVID-19 vaccine has been thoroughly tested in laboratory and clinical settings to make sure it is safe and effective. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized all the vaccines under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA), meaning each vaccine must be proven safe and effective in the same way that all medications and devices must be. Since the vaccines were approved, millions of people in the United States have received COVID-19 vaccines under the most intense safety monitoring in U.S. history. In late August 2021, Pfizer became the first COVID-19 vaccine to receive full approval from the FDA for those 16 and older. In January 2022, Moderna received full approval from the FDA for those 18 and older. The Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines will continue to be studied for safety and efficacy.

For primary and booster vaccination, people should receive an age-appropriate mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna). The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is authorized for anyone age 18 and older if no other approved vaccine is available. CDC said that receiving any vaccine is better than being unvaccinated, and the public will continue to have access to Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine. Please discuss the risks and benefits with your healthcare provider or the healthcare professional at your vaccination site.

How much does the vaccine cost?
The vaccine is free, but if you have insurance, the company may be charged an administration fee for the first dose and a smaller fee for the second dose. Please bring your insurance card to your appointment. If you do not have insurance, you will not be charged.

Who can get vaccinated?
You can get vaccinated if you are age 5 or older. For primary and booster vaccination, people should receive an age-appropriate mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna). If you are younger than 18, you must receive the Pfizer vaccine. It is the only vaccine to receive an EUA from the FDA for ages 5 to 15, and full approval for 16 and older. The Moderna vaccine has full FDA approval for anyone age 18 and older. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is authorized for anyone age 18 and older if no other approved vaccine is available. More information on vaccines is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How does the vaccine work?
There are three COVID-19 vaccines that are available in the United States: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson/Janssen. Each type of vaccine prompts our bodies to recognize and protect us from the virus that causes COVID-19. None of these vaccines can give you COVID-19.

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines contain a very small piece of messenger RNA (mRNA), a type of material that gives your body instructions for making a protein from the COVID-19 virus. Once this protein is made, it triggers your body to make antibodies to fight it. If you are exposed to the virus that causes

COVID-19, you will already have antibodies to fight the virus. The mRNA never enters the nucleus of our body cells, which is where our DNA (genetic material) is found.

The Johnson & Johnson/Janssen is a single-dose vaccine. It's different than the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine because it's a viral vector vaccine. It uses a modified version of a different virus (the vector) to deliver important instructions to our cells. This prompts our bodies to build T-lymphocytes and B-lymphocytes that will remember how to fight that virus if we are infected in the future.

Read more from the CDC about [Understanding How COVID-19 Vaccines Work](#).

How can I get a vaccine?
If you are age 5 or older, you can schedule a COVID-19 vaccination appointment. [Click here](#) to register or call Indiana 211 (866-211-9966) if you do not have access to a computer or need assistance. You can also visit the [Indiana COVID-19 Vaccine Site Map](#) to find an interactive map of vaccine providers across the state. Walk-in appointments are also accepted at many vaccination sites. Please note that you must receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine if you are younger than 18.

Why was it determined a smaller dose was necessary for children under the age of 12?
The FDA recommended a 10 mcg dose of the Pfizer vaccine for use in children 5 to 11 years old. This dose is one third of the 30 mcg dose used for people 12 and older. Clinical trial data showed that a smaller dose for children 5 to 11 produces a strong immune response (very similar to that of adults with a 30 mcg dose) and causes fewer side effects than a 30 mcg dose.

Who is eligible for boosters?
A "booster dose" is another dose of a vaccine that is given to someone who built enough protection after vaccination, but then that protection decreased over time (this is called waning immunity). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has [recommended booster doses](#) of the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines. The CDC has also approved "mix and match" booster doses for those who are eligible for a booster dose after their primary series. This means that a person can receive a booster of a COVID-19 vaccine that is different than the COVID-19 vaccine they received for their primary series.

Booster shots are recommended for those who are:
- 12 and older and completed their primary vaccination series of Pfizer at least 5 months ago
- 18 and older and completed their primary vaccination series of Moderna at least 5 months ago or completed their primary vaccination of Johnson & Johnson at least 2 months ago

There are different [recommendations](#) for moderately or severely immunocompromised people. A second booster dose has been [authorized](#) for certain people at increased risk of severe disease.

What are the benefits of a booster dose?
The booster dose improves your immune protection that can decline over time. The CDC recommends everyone age 12 and older get a booster for the best protection against COVID-19. Although COVID-19 vaccines remain effective in preventing severe disease, [recent data](#) suggest their effectiveness at preventing infection or severe illness wanes over time, especially in people ages 65 years and older. As COVID-19

variants spread across the United States, a booster shot will help strengthen your protection against infection and severe illness — especially if you are at high-risk for exposure to COVID-19 or the complications from severe illness.

Do I need a second booster dose?
The CDC expanded eligibility for an additional booster dose for certain individuals who may be at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19. Boosters are safe and provide substantial benefit. All eligible adults, adolescents, and children 5 and older should stay up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines, which includes getting boosters when eligible.

The CDC has authorized a second booster shot using an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) for people:
- 12 and older with weakened immune systems and received their initial booster at least 4 months ago
- 18 and older and received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine for their primary series and received a Johnson & Johnson booster dose at least 4 months ago
- 50 and older and received their initial booster dose at least 4 months ago

See additional recommendations for people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised.

What is the time for immunity once fully vaccinated and how long does immunity last? Do I have to get a vaccine every year like the flu?
Vaccination is the best protection against the COVID-19 virus. People who stay up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations are protected best. Up to date means a person has received all recommended doses in their primary series COVID-19 vaccine, and a booster dose when eligible.

You are still considered fully vaccinated two weeks after the second dose in a two-dose Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or two weeks after the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen single-dose vaccine. However, you will receive the best protection from staying up to date. Find current COVID-19 vaccine recommendations here.

People who are moderately or severely immunocompromised have different COVID-19 vaccine primary series and booster recommendations that can be found here.

Can I get a COVID-19 and flu vaccine at the same time?
Yes, you can get a COVID-19 vaccine and a flu vaccine at the same time. Even though both vaccines can be given at the same visit, you should follow the recommended schedule for either vaccine: If you haven't gotten your currently recommended doses of COVID-19 vaccine, get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you can, and ideally get a flu vaccine by the end of October at the start of flu season, but any time after is still effective.

Can I get vaccinated if I recently had COVID-19?
Once you have recovered from your illness and have met the criteria for ending isolation, you can get vaccinated. You should not get vaccinated while ill or during an isolation or quarantine period to avoid exposing others. Even those who were treated for COVID-19 with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma can be vaccinated after ending isolation.

Research has shown that natural immunity from a COVID-19 infection typically lasts 90 days, but you don't need to wait that long to get vaccinated. Evidence is emerging that people who have been fully vaccinated

have better protection against COVID-19 than those who were previously infected but never got vaccinated. Talk to your healthcare professional if you have questions about getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

After a person receives both doses of the vaccine, if they develop cold/flu symptoms, what are the recommendations? Should they be tested for SARS-CoV-2 and influenza?
You may experience some discomfort in the days following your immunization. These discomforts can be an indication that your body's immune system is working with the vaccine to develop antibodies. These discomforts should only last a few days and may include:

- Pain or redness where the shot was given
- Soreness in the arm where the shot was given
- Fatigue
- Chills
- Fever

These are some of the common symptoms experienced in the days after vaccination. This does not mean you have COVID-19. The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 or other infections. If you develop a cough, sore throat or runny nose, please follow current monitoring and testing guidelines for COVID-19.

If you have received the vaccine, you are encouraged to participate in V-safe, an after-vaccination health checker that works on your smartphone. If you believe you may be experiencing a reaction to the shot, contact your medical provider and report it via the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Reports can be entered here: https://vaers.hhs.gov/esub/index.jsp.

Will the vaccine make antibody tests positive?
COVID-19 vaccines teach your body to produce antibodies to fight infection from the virus that causes COVID-19. If you get an antibody test after receiving a vaccine, you might test positive by some (but not all) antibody tests. This depends on which type of antibody the specific test detects. COVID-19 vaccines will not cause you to test positive on viral tests.

Will the vaccine be mandatory?
The state of Indiana will not mandate the COVID-19 vaccine. The decision regarding whether to mandate that individuals receive the vaccine will likely be made by the employers, schools, institutes of learning or other non-healthcare entities.

Do I still have to quarantine if I am a contact of someone with COVID-19 if I'm vaccinated?
The CDC has updated its quarantine guidelines. Vaccinated people do not need to quarantine after exposure if they have received all recommended vaccine doses (including boosters and additional doses if eligible), OR had confirmed COVID-19 within the 90 days before exposure. They should continue to wear a mask around others for 10 days following their exposure and isolate if they develop symptoms. Even if you don't develop symptoms, get tested at least 5 days after you last had close contact with someone with COVID-19.

After you are vaccinated, can you stop wearing masks?
If you travel, you should still take steps to protect yourself and others. The CDC recommends that people wear masks in indoor public transportation settings. Transportation systems and hubs retain the right to make customers wear masks. Check the mask policies of the transportation systems you are using and any transportation hubs you may pass through during your travel.

[COVID-19 Community Levels](#) is a new tool to help people decide what prevention steps to take based on the latest data. CDC recommends taking precautions to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 based on the COVID-19 Community Level in your area. Immunocompromised people may need to [layer prevention strategies](#) (vaccination, masking, physical distancing) to protect themselves against COVID-19 and should speak with a healthcare provider for more information.

You should still watch out for [symptoms of COVID-19](#), especially if you've been around someone who is sick. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should get [tested](#) and [stay home](#) and away from others. Check the CDC's latest [quarantine and isolation guidelines](#) for specific details.

Should I get a COVID-19 vaccine if I have had allergic reactions to other injections?
If you are allergic to polyethylene glycol (PEG) or polysorbate, you should not get a COVID-19 vaccine at this time. PEG and polysorbate are closely related to each other. PEG is an ingredient in the mRNA vaccines, and polysorbate is an ingredient in Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine.

If you have had an immediate allergic reaction — even if it was not severe — to a vaccine or injectable therapy for another disease, ask your doctor if you should get a COVID-19 vaccine. Your doctor will help you decide if it is safe for you to get vaccinated.

The CDC recommends that you get vaccinated even if you have a history of severe allergic reactions not related to vaccines or injectable medications, such as food, pet, venom, environmental or latex. You may also get vaccinated if you have a history of allergies to oral medications or a family history of severe allergic reactions.

Additional resources:

- State of Indiana Coronavirus Information: https://ourshot.in.gov
- Pfizer Vaccine Fact Sheet for Recipients (English): https://www.fda.gov/media/144414/download
- Pfizer Vaccine Fact Sheet for Recipients (Spanish / Additional Languages): https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine#additional
- Moderna Vaccine Fact Sheet for Recipients (English): https://www.modernatx.com/covid19vaccine-eua/.
- Moderna Vaccine Fact Sheet for Recipients (Spanish / Additional Languages): https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/moderna-covid-19-vaccine.
- Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) Vaccine Fact Sheet for Recipients (English): https://www.fda.gov/media/146305/download
- Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) Vaccine Fact Sheet for Recipients (Spanish / Additional Languages): https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/janssen-covid-19-vaccine#additional
- CDC COVID-19 Vaccine Information: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines.html
- CDC Information on mRNA Vaccines: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html
- CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) Recommendations: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/covid-19.html

- CDC Vaccine Safety: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety.html
- CDC Vaccine Booster Information: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster-shot.html
- Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS): https://vaers.hhs.gov/esub/index.jsp.