Get answers about the COVID-19 vaccine

The FDA has authorized the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for anyone 12 and older. This is an exciting and important step in the fight to end the pandemic. **The Pfizer vaccine is the only COVID-19 vaccine authorized for children.** The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine are authorized for people ages 18 and older.

COVID-19 vaccines are not only incredibly effective at preventing sickness, hospitalization, and death[1] but will help us return to our normal activities. Recent studies show the vaccines work against the new variants of the virus identified so far[2] and prevent transmission of the virus to other people. People who choose to get vaccinated not only protect themselves from the virus, but also help protect those in our community who may be more vulnerable or who are unable to get vaccinated right now.

Should I get vaccinated if I've already had COVID-19?

Yes, even if you've already had COVID-19 you should still get vaccinated. The vaccines provide additional protection from the disease and possible reinfections. Studies are showing the vaccine better protects you from variants of the virus. This may also mean the vaccine provides longer lasting immunity compared to natural immunity, or immunity from having the disease. Vaccination is a much safer and effective way to develop immunity than being infected by the virus and having COVID-19 as a disease.

What side effects could I have after getting the vaccine?[3]

The COVID-19 vaccine are safe and effective. But, like all medicines, some people may have side effects, so it's important to be aware of what those are and things to watch for.

Common side effects
You may have mild to moderate side effects, for a few days. These are normal signs the body is building protection and the immune system is doing what it is supposed to do. These side effects usually go away in 12-48 hours. Some people have no side effects or may have different side effects after their 2nd dose than they did after their 1st shot. Getting a common side effect is not a reason not to get a 2nd dose of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. You need both doses to be fully protected.

1 https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/meetings/downloads/slides-2021-05-12/04-COVID-Oliver-508.pdf
2 https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/fully-vaccinated-people.html
3 https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/pfizer/reactogenicity.html

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On the arm where you got the shot:

- Pain
- Redness
- Swelling

Throughout the rest of your body:

- Chills
- Diarrhea
- Fever or feeling sweaty
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Nausea, or feeling sick to your stomach
- Tiredness

Less common side effects

Some children may experience swollen and tender lymph nodes (called lymphadenopathy), usually in the armpit or neck area.

Some people may have a red, itchy, swollen, or painful rash where they got the shot, often called "COVID arm." These rashes can start a few days to more than a week after the 1st shot. If your child has "COVID arm" after getting the 1st dose, they should still get the 2nd dose. Ask your child's doctor about treating this with an antihistamine to help with itchiness, or acetaminophen or a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) for pain.

Helpful tips to manage side effects

It's best to wait as long as you can to take any pain medicine after you get a vaccine. Talk to your doctor about taking an over-the-counter medicine, like ibuprofen, acetaminophen (often called Tylenol), or naprosyn, to help with pain or discomfort from any side effects.

It's important to keep taking any long-term daily medications after vaccination, unless your doctor has told you not to.

To reduce pain and discomfort where you got the shot:
- Apply a clean, cool, wet washcloth over the area.
- Use or exercise your arm.

To reduce discomfort from fever:
- Drink plenty of water.
- Dress lightly, in clothes that won't make you hot.

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When to call a doctor

In most cases, you will only experience normal side effects. Call a doctor or healthcare provider:
- If the redness or tenderness where you got the shot starts to get worse after 24 hours (or 1 day).
- If you are worried about any unusual symptoms you may have, or have questions about a combination of side effects from getting more than one vaccine at the same time.
- If you are worried about your side effects or the side effects don't seem to be going away after a few days.

Call a doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms up to 3 weeks after getting a COVID-19 vaccine:
- Abnormal heartbeat
- Blurred vision
- Chest pain
- Confusion or trouble speaking
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Leg swelling
- New or easy bruising
- Petechiae (tiny red spots on the skin)
- Severe abdominal pain that won't go away
- Severe headaches or headaches that won't go away
- Seizures
- Shortness of breath
- Weakness or sensory changes

Severe or serious side effects after getting a vaccine are rare[4]

Allergic reactions are considered severe if someone needs to be treated with epinephrine or EpiPen© or go to the hospital. These types of reactions are called anaphylaxis, and almost always happen within 30 minutes after getting the vaccine. People may have trouble breathing, swelling of the face and throat, a fast heartbeat, a bad rash all over the body, or dizziness and weakness. This is why it's important to stay for 15-30 minutes after getting vaccinated, so your doctor can watch you and make sure everything is okay. Medicines are available to treat anaphylaxis. Anyone who has an anaphylactic reaction after their 1st dose of the vaccine should **not** get the 2nd dose.

Non-severe, immediate allergic reactions are also rare.
Allergic reactions that do not require emergency care or hospitalization are called a non-severe, immediate allergic reaction. These types of reactions happen within 4 hours after getting vaccinated. People may get hives, swelling, or wheezing. If your child has a non-severe, immediate allergic reaction after getting a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine he or she should not get a 2nd dose, even if the reaction was not severe enough to require emergency care or hospitalization.

4
Hours

4 https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/allergic-reaction.html

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The chance of long-term side effects is extremely low.

If you look at the history of all vaccinations, the overwhelming majority of long-term side effects from vaccination occur between 30-45 days after the vaccine clinical trials end. That's why the FDA requires a wait time of at least 60 days after the end of a clinical trial before an emergency use authorization (EUA) can be given.

The FDA and CDC will keep monitoring any possible rare side effects

The vaccines were developed quickly by cutting red tape and bureaucracy, not cutting corners or skipping any safety precautions. Scientists have been working with the technology used to develop the vaccines for more than a decade. The millions of cases of COVID-19 across the world allowed scientists to quickly study the virus to develop a vaccine that was safe and effective. Millions of people in the United States have received COVID-19 vaccines under the most intense safety monitoring in history. The FDA, CDC, and Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)[5] have carefully reviewed all available data and are confident the vaccines are safe and effective to prevent COVID-19. **Your chance of having a life-threatening case of COVID-19 are much higher than your potential risk of ever getting a serious side effect from the vaccine.**

The United States has the best system in the world[6] to look for rare side effects that can only be found when vaccines are administered widely to many people. The CDC reports to the public whenever someone has reported an illness after getting a vaccine, whether or not the illness is caused by the vaccine. Anyone can report an illness or side effect after getting a vaccine, not just doctors. This information is reported through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). It's important to remember that if a health problem is reported to VAERS, that doesn't mean that the vaccine caused the problem. It simply warns scientists, vaccine safety experts, and doctors of any potential problems that may need to be looked at more carefully.

An example of how well the system works was finding out so quickly that the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine was associated with a very rare type of blood clot (thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome or TTS) that needed to be treated differently than other types of blood clots. The VAERS system was able to identify the rare side effect and the CDC was able to tell doctors the best way to treat these blood clots. Now, even if someone were to get this rare side effect, doctors can effectively treat it. It is important to point out that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is a different type of vaccine than the mRNA vaccines by Pfizer and Moderna. There has been no association with blood clots in more than 200 million doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. The Pfizer vaccine is the only COVID-19 vaccine authorized for children.

The vaccine safety system has received some reports of myocarditis (swelling and inflammation of the heart muscle) or pericarditis (inflammation of the membrane surrounding the heart).[7] These health conditions are not uncommon. Myocarditis and pericarditis usually happen after an infection with viruses like flu, Lyme disease, or even COVID-19, and can be treated. About 10 to 20 people out of every 100,000 people in the U.S. are diagnosed with myocarditis each year. It is not known yet if these rare cases of myocarditis are connected to the vaccines. The American Heart Association recently made a statement[8] advising people that since the reported cases are rare and mostly mild, the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines still far outweigh any potential risk of this side effect.

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5 https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7020e1.htm?s_cid=mm7020e1_w

6 https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/index.html

7 https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/myocarditis.html

8 https://newsroom.heart.org/news/covid-19-vaccine-benefits-still-outweigh-risks-despite-possible-rare-heart-complications

Why do children need to get vaccinated for COVID-19?

There is a common misunderstanding that children do not get COVID-19 or are not at risk for severe illness from the virus. However, some children do get sick enough to require treatment in the hospital. There is much we still don't know about how COVID-19 will continue to impact children long-term.

COVID-19 is far more dangerous than any potential risks from getting a vaccine. Children suffer from serious, potentially long-lasting side effects at rates similar to adults, even when they never had symptoms or had only mild symptoms at the time of their infection. Many children continue to suffer with fatigue, headaches, abdominal pain, muscle and joint pain, and difficulty with memory and processing information.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, 77,827 Utah children ages 0-18 have been diagnosed with COVID-19, with 683 needing to be hospitalized. Of those requiring hospitalization in that age group, 74 developed multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C). MIS-C is a serious condition that can lead to death.

77,827
Utah children

Have the COVID-19 vaccines caused any deaths?

There have been no deaths directly caused by the vaccines, out of more than 259 million doses of COVID-19 administered in the United States from December 14, 2020 to May 10, 2021.[9]

The CDC did find that the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine caused a rare and serious adverse event —blood clots with low platelets—in a very small number of people. At the time, many doctors were not aware that these rare blood clots needed to be treated differently than they would treat other blood clots. Unfortunately, treating these rare blood clots with the same medicine as other blood clots can have very serious side effects—and a few individuals died— because their blood clots were not treated with the correct medicine. There has been no association with blood clots and the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna).

There have been no deaths from any side effect (even rare ones) for the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna). Pfizer is the only vaccine authorized for children younger than 18 years old. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is not authorized for children younger than 18.

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9 https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html

Who shouldn't get the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine?

The Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for people 12 years of age and older. You should not get this vaccine if you:

- Had a severe allergic reaction after the 1st dose of the vaccine.
- Had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in the vaccine.
- Talk to your doctor before getting a COVID-19 vaccine if they had an immediate allergic reaction to their 1st dose of COVID-19 vaccine, or an allergic reaction to another type of vaccine or injectable therapy for another disease, even if it was not severe.

You can get vaccinated even if you have a history of severe allergic reactions that are not related to vaccines or injectable medications, such as a food, pet, venom, environmental, or latex allergy. You can also get vaccinated if you have a history of allergies to oral medications or a family history of severe allergic reactions.[10]

Can I get other vaccines at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine?

When you get your COVID-19 vaccine, it is a good time to make sure you and your child are up-to-date on other vaccinations. **COVID-19 vaccines and other vaccines may now be given on the same day, and you no longer have to wait to get vaccinated for COVID-19 if you've had a different type of vaccine in the last 14 days.**[11] Ask your doctor about the potential side effects of each vaccine, so you know what to watch out for. It's possible you may experience side effects from BOTH vaccines at the same time.

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10 https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/specific-groups/allergies.html

11 https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html#Coadministration

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Should I report any side effects after getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

If you think you had a side effect after getting vaccinated, you can report it to the CDC's Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). You can also ask your doctor to report it to VAERS for you. VAERS helps scientists and medical experts quickly detect unusual or unexpected patterns of health problems (also called "adverse events") that might indicate a possible safety problem with a vaccine.
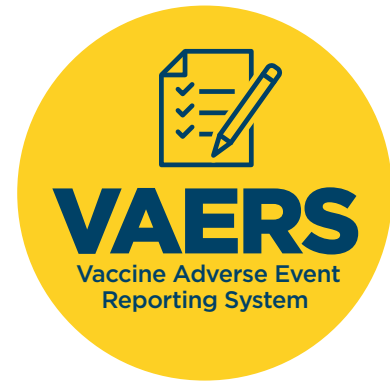
Sign up with V-safe

V-safe is an online tool that lets you tell the CDC if you get any side effects after getting the COVID-19 vaccine. You can also get reminders if you need a 2nd dose. Learn more about v-safe at www.cdc.gov/vsafe.

5 https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html#Coadministration

6 https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/concerns/multiple-vaccines-immunity.html

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