Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19 and the COVID-19 Vaccines

Who can get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Everyone ages 5 and older in the United States can get a COVID-19 vaccine.

The vaccines are free for everyone—citizens and noncitizens alike, regardless of your immigration status. You don't need health insurance, and many vaccine providers don't require any forms of ID.

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States meet the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) very high safety standards. Hundreds of millions of people in the United States have safely received COVID-19 vaccines under the most intense safety monitoring in U.S. history. Serious side effects and allergic reactions are extremely rare, occurring in only a small number of people. Serious side effects that could cause a long-term health problem are extremely unusual following any vaccination, including COVID-19 vaccination.

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe for children?

COVID-19 vaccines were rigorously tested in thousands of children before authorization by the FDA. They were shown to be safe and effective during the clinical trials.

Children had the same kinds of temporary side effects from vaccines as adults. Side effects during the clinical trials were usually mild and went away on their own in a few days.

What safeguards are in place to make sure COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

Before the FDA makes vaccines available to the public:

- Scientists must test the vaccines in medical studies, called clinical trials, with thousands of participants. These studies compare what happens to people who get the vaccine with people who don't get the vaccine.
- FDA scientists review the data from the medical studies and inspect the places where the vaccines are made before they authorize or approve the vaccines for public use.

Even after vaccines are available to the public:

- FDA and CDC scientists closely monitor how the vaccines are made and given to identify any safety issues.
- FDA and CDC scientists closely review any reports of side effects or reactions and share these facts with the public.

How can COVID-19 vaccines be safe? They were developed so fast.

COVID-19 may be a new disease, but vaccines aren't new. Scientists were able to quickly develop safe, effective COVID-19 vaccines by applying many years of vaccine experience and advances in technology.

Also, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) had been working on a coronavirus vaccine before the pandemic and was able to use that experience in developing a COVID-19 vaccine.

Importantly, no one has cut any corners or skipped any steps that affect vaccine safety in the development, testing, authorization, and approval of COVID-19 vaccines.

What are common side effects from COVID-19 vaccines for children?

Children who've gotten a COVID-19 vaccine have the same common side effects as adults. Also, children may have side effects after getting vaccinated, which are similar to those they may experience after getting routine vaccinations.

Common side effects include:
- Pain, redness, or swelling where you got your shot
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Fever
- Nausea

These side effects are normal and typically last for a couple days after vaccination. They are signs that the vaccine is working and that your child's body is building protection against the virus.

What are the more serious side effects of COVID-19 vaccines?

Serious side effects from any vaccine, including the COVID-19 vaccines, are very rare. It's also highly unlikely that the vaccines will cause any long-term health problems. There is currently no evidence that vaccine ingredients or antibodies made following COVID-19 vaccination would cause any problems with becoming pregnant now or in the future.

A very small proportion, less than one in ten thousand (<0.0001%) of vaccinated people have experienced the following in the hours and days after vaccination with one or more of the vaccines:
- Anaphylaxis—an allergic reaction that, if it happens, is likely to occur within minutes of vaccination. Vaccination sites are prepared to handle any rare cases of anaphylaxis that occur.
- Myocarditis and pericarditis—two kinds of heart inflammation that, if they happen, are likely to occur within several days of vaccination.
- Guillain-Barré syndrome—a rare autoimmune disorder that, if it happens, is likely to occur within the first couple of weeks after vaccination.

- Thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome—an extremely rare blood-clotting condition that, if it happens, is likely to occur within the first couple of weeks after vaccination.

If any of these unlikely reactions happen, health care providers know how to treat them. The fact that we know of these extremely rare cases shows that the FDA and CDC's vaccine safety monitoring systems work and catch even the rarest reactions.

Will I or my child get myocarditis or pericarditis from receiving an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine?

Myocarditis and pericarditis are two kinds of heart inflammation that can cause symptoms like chest pain, a fast or hard heartbeat, and shortness of breath. These kinds of heart inflammations after vaccination are extremely rare. When they happen, they mostly happen in male adolescents and young adults, typically within several days after mRNA COVID-19 vaccination. Patients usually recover quickly and respond well to medications and rest.

What's in COVID-19 vaccines?

The active ingredient is a molecule with instructions for your cells. All three available vaccines also contain water, sugars, and salts. Depending on which vaccine you get, it may also contain acids, alcohol, fat, or preservatives.

How do COVID-19 vaccines work?

The COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States give your cells the instructions to make a protein like the one found on the surface of the coronavirus, called a spike protein.

Your immune system sees the spike protein as an invading germ and reacts by creating cells that will be ready to identify and attack the coronavirus if you are exposed to it. You're never exposed to the real virus, so you cannot get COVID-19 from a COVID-19 vaccine.

Once your cells make the spike protein, the instructions are destroyed, and your body gets rid of them. At no point do the vaccines change or interact with your DNA.

How effective are COVID-19 vaccines?

All available COVID-19 vaccines are very effective. They are highly effective against severe illness, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19.

If my child has had COVID-19, do they need to get vaccinated?

Yes. You should get your child vaccinated against COVID-19 even if they've already had COVID-19. Having had COVID-19 doesn't necessarily protect someone against getting infected again. In fact, a recent study found that unvaccinated individuals are more than twice as likely to be reinfected with COVID-19 than those who had COVID-19 and then got vaccinated.