



## **COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Community Members**

### **When will the vaccine be available to me?**

Rush is currently focused on providing both doses of the vaccine to our employees. We are working with local and state public health agencies on plans to begin offering the vaccine to the community. We will share details widely with our patients and communities as soon as our community vaccination plan is finalized. Health care workers and other groups most at risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19, such as nursing home residents, people age 65 or older and essential workers are likely to be first in line to receive vaccinations.

State and local public health agencies are working on a plan to vaccinate the community. The decisions are shaped by a group of independent experts trying to ensure that the process is ethical, equitable, transparent and helps the greatest number of people.

Rush will share information about a community vaccination plan to our patients and our communities as soon as it's finalized.

For updated info, please visit the following county registries:

- [Cook County](https://vaccine.cookcountyil.gov/) (https://vaccine.cookcountyil.gov/)
- [Kane County](https://kanehealth.com/Pages/COVID-Vaccine.aspx) (https://kanehealth.com/Pages/COVID-Vaccine.aspx)
- [Kendall County](http://www.kendallhealth.org/community-health/covid-19-vaccine/) (http://www.kendallhealth.org/community-health/covid-19-vaccine/)
- [Lake County](https://allvax.lakecohealth.org/s/?language=en_US) (https://allvax.lakecohealth.org/s/?language=en\_US)

### **Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?**

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have been found to be safe and effective at protecting people from COVID-19. Tens of thousands, including people of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, volunteered for clinical trials to find out whether the vaccines are safe and effective. They also included people who have other health conditions, such as diabetes, HIV, heart disease, lung disease and more — and there were no specific complications for these groups either. The results of the trials are reviewed by independent experts, companies that are making the vaccine, and a federal government agency called the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Trials for the COVID-19 vaccine began in early 2020, and the reported results so far show the two vaccines are up to 95% effective in creating proteins that fight COVID-19, which is very promising. Vaccine safety gets assessed based on the experience of volunteers who received the vaccine during the trials. The thousands of volunteers are followed closely for at least two months to monitor their health before the vaccine can be authorized for use. Any negative reactions to a vaccine would most likely happen within that period. The volunteers are also observed long term to monitor for any other problems.



## **How did vaccine-makers create this vaccine so quickly? Doesn't it usually take much longer?**

While vaccines do normally take longer, governments and companies all around the world have invested billions of dollars and worked with the top experts to get vaccines as soon as possible because so many people are at risk due to COVID-19.

There are a number of factors that helped them get it done so fast. First, COVID-19 is caused by a coronavirus, which is a type of virus. There are other types of coronaviruses in the world, and people were already working on vaccines for other coronaviruses, which gave vaccine developers a head start.

Also, this is not the first time we've had a vaccine developed this quickly. With H1N1, we started seeing cases in March 2009, and by October 2009 we had a vaccine.

Lastly, companies, governments and universities from across the world worked together and used the most advanced technology to develop these vaccines. The most experienced people on vaccines in the world, with billions of dollars to aid them and millions of lives at stake have worked tirelessly to create COVID-19 vaccines as quickly as possible. This all-in effort has resulted in not just one possible vaccine, but multiple candidates. At the same time, the vaccines are still put through trials and tests for safety and effectiveness.

## **Wait, why are there different coronavirus vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZenca, Johnson & Johnson, etc.)? Don't we need just one? Is one better than the others?**

Multiple vaccines means there will be a greater supply of vaccines to give to people. Different companies took different scientific approaches to developing the COVID-19 vaccine. That means there are some differences in the vaccines, such as how many doses you might need, how many days the doses are spaced apart, and the way the vaccine prompts your body to protect you against the virus.

However, they all serve the same purpose, to help lower the risk of you and others getting COVID-19.

## **How effective are the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines?**

Both vaccines showed around 95% effectiveness at preventing COVID-19. To break that down further:

- The Pfizer trial included 44,000 volunteers. Of those participants, only 170 developed symptoms of COVID-19.
- The Moderna trial had more than 30,000 volunteers. Only 196 developed symptoms of COVID-19.



Both vaccines require two doses: Pfizer's 21 days apart and Moderna's 28 days apart. It is essential that people receive both doses. There is some protection after the first dose. However, the second dose is required to achieve the 95% efficacy; the full benefit is achieved 7 to 14 days after that second dose is given.

### **How long does it take after getting a vaccine to be protected against the virus? After I get vaccinated, can I stop wearing a mask and return to normal?**

It is estimated that an individual will be protected 14 days, or two weeks, after receiving the second dose of vaccine. Most of the COVID-19 vaccines require two doses taken three or four weeks apart. It is estimated that an individual will be protected 14 days, or two weeks, after receiving the second dose of vaccine.

It is not yet clear if being vaccinated means you cannot still spread the virus to other people. Therefore, until the majority of people are vaccinated, it is likely we will need to continue wearing masks and taking other precautions.

### **Do the vaccines prevent the spread or transmission of COVID-19?**

Almost all of the other vaccines used in the past have prevented transmission, so it is expected that there will be a decreased risk of transmission with these vaccines as well. There is not yet any information on whether the COVID-19 vaccines will prevent transmission.

However, until we know for sure, and until enough people are vaccinated, continue to wear masks and practice social distancing and hand washing.

### **Will there be any side effects from the vaccine?**

The most common reactions to the vaccine based on the clinical trials will be soreness where the shot was given, which goes away quickly on its own. It is expected that for the vaccine there will be additional mild side effects that include muscle pain, fever, fatigue, headache and joint pain. Severe side effects to vaccines are extremely rare (For example, a severe allergic reaction that requires a person to be treated with epinephrine or EpiPen® or be treated at a hospital). Minor side effects are a sign that your body is starting to build immunity (protection) against a disease.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have been found to be safe, and most people have been able to tolerate them pretty well. The independent board that conducted analysis of Moderna's trial found that side effects included fatigue in 9.7% of participants, muscle pain in 8.9%, joint pain in 5.2% and headache in 4.5%. For the Pfizer vaccine, the numbers were lower: Side effects included fatigue (3.8%) and headache (2%).

But the benefits outweigh any potential side effects. Studies have shown there's a significantly lower risk of getting COVID-19 if you are vaccinated — and in those who did get the disease, the symptoms were milder in people who were vaccinated than those who were not.



### **Why is fever a side effect of the vaccine? Does that mean I am getting a form of COVID-19?**

Mild fever is a common side effect of many vaccinations, such as the flu vaccine, which millions of people get every year. It does not mean you will have COVID-19. The vaccine essentially trains your body to recognize the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 and destroys it if you were to be exposed to it in everyday life. Since a fever is part of the way your body fights off a virus, a mild fever can be part of the body's training to fight off COVID-19.

### **Should women who are pregnant or breastfeeding get the vaccine? Is it safe for them?**

It is too soon to say. Because the Pfizer and Moderna trials did not include pregnant or breastfeeding women, there is no information to guide us at this point. It's best for women who are pregnant, planning to become pregnant soon or breastfeeding to consult with their doctor about the decision to get the vaccine.

### **Do any of the new COVID-19 vaccines change my DNA?**

No, none of the COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the U.S. will affect a person's DNA or genetic makeup. You may hear that two of the vaccines, one by Pfizer/BioNTech and the other by Moderna, use something called messenger RNA (mRNA), which is a molecule that carries the information cells use to produce different proteins: Think of it as a blueprint. The vaccines harmlessly mimic the virus' ability to trigger the body's immune responses to infections. But it does not change a person's DNA or alter their genetic make-up.

### **Can the vaccine give you COVID-19?**

No. The vaccines contain neither a weakened version of a live virus nor a dead version of the virus.

### **What if I have "antibodies"? Does that mean I still need the vaccine?**

After vaccination, your body will produce antibodies that protect you from getting COVID-19. In addition to those who are vaccinated, people who survived a case of COVID-19 may also have antibodies. However, it is not known how long antibodies against the coronavirus last. Also, current tests for antibodies are not necessarily reliable. Therefore, even if you had, or think you have had, COVID-19 already, still strongly consider getting vaccinated.

### **Will the vaccine protect me from COVID-19 for life?**

Simply put, that is not known yet. Some vaccines protect you for a long period of time, while others, like the flu vaccine, need to be taken every year. As those who receive the vaccine are monitored, more clarity will be gained on how long protection lasts.



### **How much will the vaccine cost?**

The federal government has promised the vaccine will be provided to people in the United States at no cost. Vaccine providers can get fees reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by a special government agency called the Health Resources and Services Administration.

### **At what point does the vaccine make the pandemic end?**

The vaccine will help us work toward ending the pandemic, which will be when enough people are protected from the virus that it can no longer spread. We still have many months until everyone gets vaccinated, and then we will still need to see how long the protection against the virus lasts. What that means is that even after you get vaccinated, it is not your "get out of COVID-19 free" card. The pandemic will end through action that includes the vaccine, but other important actions like everyone wearing masks, avoiding crowds, social distancing and practicing good hygiene.

### **Can a school/workplace make getting a vaccine mandatory?**

Mandatory vaccines are most commonly tied to public school attendance, and all 50 states require students to receive some vaccines, with exemptions for medical, religious and philosophical reasons. Workplaces where there are increased risks of spreading the virus, such as a hospital or nursing home, may make the vaccine mandatory. Even in those cases there still can be exemptions. We advise speaking with the workplaces and schools that are relevant to you to learn if they are considering requirements around COVID-19 vaccines.

### **I never get the flu shot. Why should I get vaccinated for COVID-19?**

Even though most people who have COVID-19 do not die, the disease is still much more deadly than the flu, and is easily spread from one person to another — possibly to someone who is very vulnerable to the disease, and who will die.

We are also still learning about the long-term effects of COVID-19 in those who survive, and in many cases, long-term effects of COVID-19 appear to be substantial. Getting vaccinated protects you, your family and your community from the consequences of COVID-19, including death.

When you get vaccinated, you help decrease the case rates of COVID-19 and end the pandemic. In this way, you are protecting loved ones and those who are most likely to die from COVID-19. Lastly, getting vaccinated helps our hospitals stay open to everyone needing care, since it reduces the number of COVID-19 patients seeking care at hospitals.



### **If I already had COVID-19, do I even need to get vaccinated?**

It is recommended that you get vaccinated even if you previously had COVID-19. While not too many people have been re-infected with COVID within six months of becoming sick, it's still unknown how long any immunity might last.

### **Tell me again, why should I trust COVID-19 vaccines from companies or the government?**

Having concerns about the vaccine is understandable. Remember though that tens of thousands of volunteers have received the COVID-19 vaccines. The government and vaccine companies are closely monitoring the trials, and the findings are publicly available. As more and more people get the vaccines, it will continue to provide evidence that the vaccine can be trusted. Those that are vaccinated protect themselves against a possibly deadly disease.

COVID-19 is widespread, and we all have a significant risk of getting it given the current infection rate. The risks of COVID-19 and its complications are far worse than the risks of the vaccines themselves. Vaccination will significantly reduce both the number of COVID-related deaths and the serious health issues that survivors face. Also, if you have family members who have weaker immune systems, vaccinating yourself will prevent you from potentially spreading COVID-19 to them.

In a nutshell: Vaccinating will help us get our lives back.

### **I really don't trust the vaccine. What can I do instead?**

If you don't trust the vaccine right away, that can be understandable. If you want to avoid getting sick from COVID-19 you can still take a few easy steps. Wear a mask, especially when in any public indoor spaces, or if you will be socializing with people you don't live with.

Because coronavirus-carrying virus particles can float and build up in the air, improving ventilation by doing things like opening windows is an important layer of protection. Better yet, go outside. Maintain social distance from those outside your household when possible, and washing your hands often is always a good idea.

Above all else, please keep an open mind and continue to evaluate the data on the vaccine. We will continue to learn more about the vaccine as time goes on. Even though you are not comfortable right now, more information as people get vaccinated may help you feel better about it.