



IDS



COVID-19 Vaccines: What Are Your Concerns?

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This resource was developed by the Infectious Diseases Society of America and its HIV Medicine Association to help frontline staff respond to questions about COVID-19 vaccines. It includes a special section for questions from [people with HIV](#). This document covers the three vaccines available and authorized for emergency use in the U.S. by the Food and Drug Administration. There are two mRNA vaccines available, which are referred to by their manufacturers' names — Moderna and Pfizer — and an adenoviral-vector vaccine, which is referred to by the manufacturer's name Janssen (which is a subsidiary of Johnson and Johnson). Unless noted differently, the information applies to all three vaccines.

A more detailed [FAQ on COVID-19 vaccines](#) is available from the [IDS COVID-19 Real-Time Learning Network](#). A more detailed FAQ on people with HIV and the COVID-19 vaccines is available in [English](#) and in [Spanish](#) from HIVMA.

How much does the vaccine protect against COVID-19?

- The vaccines we have now will prevent almost all people who get them from getting sick with COVID-19. In studies of the people who received the vaccine and got sick, few needed to go in the hospital, and no one died from COVID-19.
- There is new information that shows that the vaccines may also stop many people from getting infected with COVID-19 altogether whether they get sick from it or not.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has [released information](#) on people who have received the vaccines so far confirming the vaccines are safe.

Do the vaccines work as well for people of all races and ethnicities?

- The studies included communities of color (Black, Latinx, Asian, Native Americans) and showed that the vaccines work just as well in everyone.

When can I get the vaccine?

- The groups eligible to receive a vaccine depend on the state you live in. Some states have opened or are preparing to open up to everyone 16 years and older. But due to limited supply, people who are most likely to either get COVID-19 or get very sick from COVID-19 have been getting the vaccine first. We anticipate that soon everyone who wants a vaccine will be able to get one.
- Information is [available online](#) on who is eligible in your state. Check with your [local](#) or [state](#) health department for the latest information for your community.

How long does it take for the vaccine to start working, and how long does it work?

- It can take a few weeks after getting the vaccine for your body to respond well enough so you are fully protected.
- The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work best 2 weeks after the second dose. It is very important to get both doses of these vaccines.
- The Janssen vaccine, which is just one shot, was 100% effective at keeping people from getting hospitalized or dying 28 days after they received it.
- We do not yet know how long the vaccine will provide high levels of protection for people. The virus that causes COVID-19 is still spreading around the U.S. Even a little protection can help prevent you from getting sick from COVID-19.

- Two weeks after you get your final shot of the vaccine, CDC says you are able to be with other vaccinated people indoors without having to wear masks or stay 6 feet apart.
- When you are in public or when you are around others who are not vaccinated, it is still important to wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet from others, avoid crowds and get-togethers and regularly wash your hands, even after getting vaccinated.

How was the vaccine developed so fast?

- A lot of money and resources were provided to develop COVID-19 vaccines because the COVID-19 pandemic has affected so many people from around the world.
- The manufacturers were able to use information they have gotten from work they had done on vaccines for other viruses.
- FDA sets standards to help make sure that vaccines are safe and will work in most people. The COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States did much better than FDA's standards.

What are the long-term effects of getting the vaccine?

- We do not yet know if there will be any long-term effects, but so far there have been very few serious side effects among the millions of people who have gotten the vaccine in the United States. We do know that some people who get COVID-19 will get very sick and some will die. For that reason, the benefits of the vaccine greatly outweigh the risks.
- Experts will continue to watch for the long-term effects in people who are getting vaccinated.

Will I get sick from the COVID-19 vaccines? Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

- Most people will get some side effects a few days after getting the vaccine. These will last up to a few days. Your immune system protects your body from viruses, and these side effects are from your immune system's reaction to the vaccine. That means that your body is doing exactly what we want it to do to build protection against COVID-19. These side effects may be stronger after the second shot of the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines or if you already have had COVID-19.
- Most people will have pain, swelling or redness in the arm; other side effects could include feeling tired, having muscle and joint aches, having a headache or having fever and chills. A small number of people had a serious allergic reaction to the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines within 15 minutes to half an hour of receiving it. That reaction can be treated immediately. That is why vaccine providers will ask you to stay for at least 15 minutes, to be watched after receiving the shot. If you have had a serious allergic reaction from a vaccine before, you should wait for at least 30 minutes.
- The vaccine does not contain the virus that causes COVID-19 and cannot give you COVID-19.

Should I get the vaccine if I've had COVID-19?

- [CDC recommends](#) getting the vaccine even if you have had COVID-19. This is because we do not know how long the protection from getting sick with COVID-19 lasts. You should not get the vaccine until you feel better and are fully recovered.

Can I get a COVID-19 vaccine if I'm pregnant? If I am breastfeeding?

- CDC and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists advise that people who are pregnant or breastfeeding can receive the vaccines if they wish to take them.
- People who are pregnant are at higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, you may choose to be vaccinated when eligible.

Do the vaccines cause infertility?

- The vaccines do not cause infertility. This is misinformation or information that is not true that is spread on the Internet.

Will the vaccines change my DNA?

- No, these vaccines do not change your DNA.

Were fetal cells used to make the COVID-19 vaccines?

- Fetal cell lines (not fetal tissue) are sometimes used to develop vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines.
- Pfizer and Moderna used them in early testing stages only.
- The Janssen vaccine does not include any fetal tissue, but a fetal stem cell line from 1985 was used to make it.
- The Vatican [issued guidance](#) in December 2020 saying that it was ok to receive COVID-19 vaccines that have used fetal stem cells when there are no other options available.
- It is important to consider the risks of getting sick or dying from COVID-19 and the benefits of getting a vaccine that will prevent that from happening.

Is it necessary to get the second dose of the vaccine?

- Yes — for the vaccines that require two doses (Moderna and Pfizer), you should receive both doses. With just one dose, you will not be protected as well. Also, the protection may not last as long.
- If you can't go back for your second vaccine at the same location, let your vaccine provider know.
- You should get the second dose as close to the day you are supposed to as you can. Sometimes, it is hard to get an appointment or there is not enough vaccine. CDC says delaying up to 6 weeks is still OK.

Can I get one dose of one vaccine and the second dose of the other vaccine?

- For vaccines that require two doses, the second dose of your vaccine should be the same brand as the first one. You can get a different brand of the vaccine if there is no way you can get the same brand you received for the first dose. However, it would need to be the same type of vaccine. For example, both shots would need to be mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna).

How will getting vaccinated change what I can do?

- Once fully vaccinated (2 weeks after your final vaccine dose), you can meet indoors with others who are fully vaccinated. When in public places or with people who are not fully vaccinated, for now, you should continue to wear a mask, stay 6 feet from others and avoid large crowds.

What are COVID-19 variants, and will the vaccines protect against them?

- As long as COVID-19 continues to spread, there is a good chance that the COVID-19 virus will change itself into what we call a variant. Some variants will act in the same way as the usual COVID-19 virus. But some variants could spread faster and easier or be more harmful or deadly.
- The vaccines still work against some of the variants we know about. We need more information to know if they will also work against other variants.
- It is very important to get as many people vaccinated as possible so that the spread of COVID-19 slows down or stops, preventing it from changing into new variants.

COVID-19 Vaccines and People with HIV

Are the vaccines safe and effective for people with HIV?

- We have limited information from studies about how the vaccines work in people with HIV, but from what we know about how the vaccines work, they should be safe for people with HIV and keep most people from getting sick. Some people with HIV were included in the studies, and more information on

safety and effectiveness is expected. The vaccines currently available in the United States do not have the virus that causes COVID-19 in them.

- CDC says you may get the vaccine when it becomes available to you. People with HIV may be more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19, so it is important to protect yourself whether you get a vaccine or not, by wearing a mask, staying at least 6 feet away from others, avoiding crowds and get-togethers and washing your hands often.
- While there is new information that the vaccines may prevent some people from getting COVID-19 without showing symptoms, we do know that for certain. This is why it is important when you are in public or when you are around people who are not vaccinated to wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet from others, avoid crowds and get-togethers and regularly wash your hands, even after getting vaccinated. We also don't know if people with HIV will have less of a response to the vaccines.
- All of the vaccines are safe and protect people from COVID-19. There is no information that one is better than another for people with HIV right now.

Can I get a vaccine at my HIV clinic, and how much will it cost?

- Vaccines are being given in a number of places. Some HIV clinics may be able to give the vaccine. Check with your HIV provider to find out.
- The government paid for the vaccines. Even if there is a charge from your provider for the visit, they must give you the vaccine for free. There are federal programs, including the Ryan White Program, that will cover these fees.

Will I have more side effects because I have HIV?

- We do not yet know if people with HIV have different side effects, but we think it's unlikely.
- Most people will get some side effects a few days after getting the vaccine. These will last a few days. Your immune system protects your body from viruses, and these side effects are from your immune system's reaction to the vaccine. That means that your body is doing exactly what we want it to do to build protection against COVID-19.
- These side effects may be stronger after the second shot for the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines or if you already have had COVID-19.
- Most people will have pain, swelling or redness in the arm; other side effects could include feeling tired, having muscle and joint aches, having a headache or having fever and chills. A small number of people had a serious allergic reaction to the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines within 15 minutes to half an hour of receiving it. That reaction can be treated immediately. That is why vaccine providers will ask you to stay for at least 15 minutes, to be watched after receiving the shot.
- If you have had a serious allergic reaction from a vaccine before, you should wait for at least 30 minutes.

Will I need to stop my HIV medications to get the vaccine?

- You don't need to stop your medications to get the vaccine. It is important to keep taking your HIV medicines. Changing or stopping your HIV medications could put you at risk for getting sick from HIV.
- HIV medicines do not stop you from getting COVID-19, and they are not being used to treat COVID-19.

If my CD4 count is low, can I still get the vaccine?

- People with low CD4 counts may be at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. CDC says that people with HIV with a low CD4 may get the vaccine when it's available.
- We do not know yet if the vaccine works as well in people with low CD4 counts. Your immune system, which fights off viruses, may not be able to protect you as well. If you get the vaccine, it is important to still wear a mask, stay 6 feet away from others, avoid large crowds or get-togethers and wash your hands regularly.