



# COVID-19 Vaccine Overview and FAQs

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## Quick Facts

- There are currently three vaccines available in the U.S. for prevention of COVID-19 disease.
  - Pfizer-BioNTech: mRNA vaccine authorized for ages 16+
  - Moderna: mRNA vaccine authorized for ages 18+
  - Janssen-Johnson & Johnson: viral vector vaccine authorized for ages 18+
- None of the currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines is a live virus vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines are mRNA vaccines that do not include viral particles OR inactivated virus and cannot give us COVID.
- None of these vaccines incorporates viral genes into our DNA; they cannot alter our DNA.
- All authorized vaccines have good efficacy against COVID-19. Some have varying efficacy depending on what time they were tested during the pandemic, what coronavirus variants were dominant at the time and which countries the clinical trials took place. All these vaccines are highly effective at keeping people out of the hospital and dying from COVID.
- The most common side effects include injection site pain, fatigue, headache, body aches, chills, fever and diarrhea. They are more common than in many other vaccines such as the flu vaccine. However, these side effects appear to last for a short time only, usually 1-2 days. Most serious side effects of any vaccine are evident by 6 weeks, and based on COVID-19 vaccine trials, we have a good idea of what side effects to expect with these vaccines.

## Key Points Regarding COVID-19

- The prevalence of COVID-19 is very high. Given the prevalence in Idaho at this time, if you do not get a vaccine you have a high likelihood of getting COVID-19 at some point.
- COVID-19 is not a benign disease. Over the past year of the pandemic, there have been more than half a million deaths in the US alone. Disability after acute illness is a real thing; some studies suggest up to a third of recovered persons can experience chronic COVID symptoms 3-9 months after illness, whether you were hospitalized for COVID or not. Chronic COVID symptoms include fatigue, brain fog, shortness of breath, sleeping problems, anxiety, depression, and GI symptoms. Other COVID survivors can suffer permanent complications, like heart and lung damage, kidney injury, cognitive impairment, and other issues.
- We have different circulating variants around the world and in the U.S. Once infected with one strain of coronavirus, it is possible to be reinfected with a different strain. The formation of variants are only possible because of the high volume of spread of COVID-19. It is so important to stop the spread now, by using all the tools available to us. These are tools we know work: social distancing, masks, frequent hand-washing, avoiding crowds and getting vaccinated.

## FAQs

### Q. Why should I get vaccinated?

- We recommend COVID-19 vaccine to our patients because of the serious burden of disease in our country.
- COVID-19 is causing an unprecedented death toll in our country; over half a million people have died at the one-year mark of this devastating pandemic.
- People of all ages have suffered serious illness and death as a result of COVID-19 infection. While younger people generally fare better, they still may have chronic COVID symptoms months after illness. Some children and adolescents can suffer a potentially deadly inflammatory disease after having COVID-19, called ‘MIS-C,’ a multisystem inflammatory syndrome of children. It has even been seen in some adults.

### Q. What kind of vaccines are these COVID-19 vaccines?

- mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) use a lipid nanoparticle that delivers a message to our cells to code for the coronavirus “spike” protein. Once our immune system acknowledges this foreign spike protein, it is kicked into action, producing a robust immune response ready to attack any further exposure to coronavirus-19.
- The current viral vector vaccine (Janssen) uses an inactivated cold virus (a virus that cannot replicate inside our bodies) to deliver a message to our cells to also produce the foreign spike protein. This then activates our immune response when exposed again to coronavirus-19.
- Again, these vaccines cannot cause coronavirus disease and they do not alter our DNA in any way. These are very safe and effective vaccines.

### Q. Are these vaccines too new to trust?

- mRNA vaccines are new to us commercially, but they have been in development for decades.
- The viral vector vaccine (the AdVac platform) is technology already used in other vaccines around the world.
- Enormous resources have been put into vaccine development by Operation Warp Speed, allowing relatively quick development this year.
- The FDA did not skip any steps in the development or approval of any COVID-19 vaccine.

### Q. Do these vaccines work, and are they safe?

- The FDA and CDC have reviewed the safety and efficacy data from the biotech companies and only authorize a vaccine if it is safe.
- The FDA’s goal for an adequate COVID vaccine is to be at least 50% efficacious. mRNA vaccines have over a 90% efficacy rate in trials done last year. The more recent trial done with the viral vector vaccine from Johnson & Johnson (done in multiple countries where coronavirus variants are common) showed a 72% efficacy rate in the U.S. All vaccines are highly effective at keeping people out of the hospital and from dying from COVID-19. Getting vaccinated is an important tool in stopping COVID-19.
- Data from all trials show that these vaccines are safe with only mild common side effects, like injection site reactions, fatigue, body aches, headaches, chills and diarrhea. (These are common with any vaccine, like the flu vaccine.) Side effects usually start within a day or two of vaccination and only last a few days as well.

- There have been rare cases of anaphylaxis after vaccination (only a few cases per million doses administered) and every vaccinator knows how to treat this rare side effect.

**Q. Should I get the vaccine if I already had COVID-19?**

- Yes. The CDC is advising everyone get the vaccine, no matter if you have had the disease or not. This is because the vaccines offer longer-lasting protection than natural infection.

**Q. Will I still have to wear a mask and social distance after I get the vaccine?**

- Yes. We follow health department guidelines on this issue. Until a certain percentage of the population has been vaccinated, we all need to continue to wear masks and social distance to slow down the spread.

**Q. Who is approved to get this vaccine?**

- Any person over the age of 18 (over age 16 for Pfizer) is approved for COVID-19 vaccination, as long as they are not allergic to any parts of the vaccine.
- There are some special populations who should consider talking to their doctor before getting vaccinated, like pregnant or breastfeeding women, people who have had anaphylaxis to other vaccines or injectable therapies, or those who are immunocompromised. All of these people can still get vaccinated.
- If you have a history of serious allergic reactions, you can still get the vaccine and will be observed closely for side effects by medical staff.
- If you have had anaphylaxis in the past to an mRNA vaccine, it is possible to receive the other type of vaccine.

**Q. Which vaccine type is the best for me?**

- The CDC and the ACIP (Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices) advise **GETTING THE VACCINE THAT IS FIRST AVAILABLE TO YOU**. You cannot be guaranteed a certain type of vaccine at any given time. Our supply of vaccines is limited and the demand is high.

**Q. When can I get the vaccine if I'm not currently eligible?**

- Primary Health staff are working with guidelines given to us by the state of Idaho to prioritize our patients who are most at-risk from severe coronavirus disease. We are contacting our patients directly when they become eligible to schedule vaccination appointments.