

THE TRUSTEE

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COVID-19: THE NEXT PHASE

The pandemic and its variants continue to pose health risks throughout the world. The Delta variant is the only one classified as a *Variant of Concern* while there are 10 variants classified as *Being Monitored*. For reasons clinically unknown, the virus appears to surge for two months, especially in states with low vaccination rates. Then, transmission decreases. The U. S. death toll reached 700,000 last month, surpassing the death toll from the 1918 flu pandemic. The CDC tracker (covid.cdc.gov) shows a 7 day moving average decrease of 11.6%, from 107,953 new cases to 95,448. Available next are booster shots.

Why are booster shots needed? First, it's important to understand that the vaccines work. The COVID-19 vaccine remains largely effective against severe disease and hospitalization, even with the Delta variant. However, there is evidence showing that vaccine effectiveness against mild to moderate illness can wane over time. For most of the public this isn't a cause for concern at the moment, but for the elderly and immune-compromised, a booster shot could help maximize their immunity and give them added protection.

Are boosters available from all COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers? Vaccine maker Moderna has asked the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) to approve its booster shot application but the FDA's current approval only covers the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Johnson & Johnson has already released data showing boosters raised immunity but have not applied via the FDA. The Pfizer-BioNTech booster is an approved preventive service under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA).

Who should get a booster shot? Eligibility criteria is based on [CDC guidance](#), which recommends booster shots at least six months after receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as follows:

People who *should* receive boosters:

- 65 and older populations and residents in long-term care settings
- 50-64 year-olds with underlying medical conditions

People who *may* receive boosters:

- 18-49 year-olds with underlying medical conditions
- 18-64 year-olds who are at increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission because of their occupational or institutional setting. It includes teachers and educational personnel working with children.

Where are booster shots available in Ulster County? Ulster County has reopened the former Best Buy store at the Hudson Valley Mall for booster shots. For the time being, the site is open only on Friday from 11 am to 7pm. In addition, the national pharmacies say they are ready to begin administering booster shots. Consult your local Health department websites for up to date information.

Please be aware that the CDC's first priority will continue to be for people to get the initial series of vaccinations. The FDA approval of the Moderna COVID-19 booster vaccine is pending while a study indicates the best booster for the Johnson & Johnson vaccine may be the Pfizer or Moderna boosters. Be aware that protocols, approvals, and recommendations may be subject to change as the virus evolves. It includes the pill produced by Merck that has been shown to be clinically effective in addressing the effects of the virus on those persons who have been diagnosed with the virus.

Valid Covid Vaccination proof documents: There are documents available showing proof of vaccination and they vary across the U.S. There is the hard copy CDC Vaccination Card (digital photocopy is acceptable), the New York State Excelsior Pass (which does not include vaccination dates), and the Excelsior Pass Plus (a secure digital copy of your vaccination record or negative test results.) The Excelsior is available only in New York State and information is available at: epass.ny.gov. New York City has a “Key to NYC Pass” app; a program of proof for admittance to public establishments in the city.

On the horizon are flu shots. They are separate from the COVID-19 vaccinations and each does not affect the other; the flu shot will not protect from Covid-19 and the Covid-19 shot will not protect against the flu. Last year, probably due to the social cautions being practiced, the flu did not infect many people. This year could be different and New York State is encouraging the flu vaccine in preparation for the flu season.

Long Term Care? If you are enrolled in LTCI and wish to be prepared for an anticipated event, the claim forms are available on the Trust website at: www.ktftrustfund.com. As there is a 90 day waiting period, after filing, before the coverage begins, it is best to be prepared.

IN MEMORIAM:
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