COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

Two of the most promising vaccines (made by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna/NIH) use the messenger RNA (mRNA) protein, which delivers a small genetic message to your cells. This message tells your cells to produce a protein that looks like the spike on the outer shell of the COVID-19 virus. Your immune system then recognizes that spiky protein as foreign and produces antibodies to fight it off. In other words, the vaccine is providing your cells with a set of plans to make non-infectious pieces of the coronavirus. Your body recognizes and produce "soldiers" (antibodies) to attack these pieces, which means these soldiers will know to attack if the actual coronavirus appears.

The genetic message (mRNA) does not last in your cells, so it cannot change or affect your DNA.

Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. The vaccines being produced now will not have any COVID-19 virus in them and therefore cannot give you COVID-19. Some people experience side effects after receiving a vaccine (including the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine), but these side effects are not the virus. It is impossible to get the COVID-19 virus from the COVID-19 vaccine.

Is it one dose or multiple doses?

Pfizer's vaccine is given in two doses, recommended 21 days apart. Moderna's vaccine is given in two doses, recommended 28 days apart.

These vaccines were made very quickly. Are they safe?

The vaccines are new, but the technology behind them is not. The family of corona viruses—of which the COVID-19 virus is one type—have been studied and tested for years, including the SARS and MERS viruses that have caused outbreaks in the past. Pharmaceutical companies had already done the foundational research needed to create a COVID-19 vaccine if an outbreak were to occur.

These specific COVID-19 vaccines have been safely tested on thousands of volunteers beginning last summer. Likewise, the FDA has maintained very strict safety guidelines through the testing process. These vaccines are now starting to be offered because

scientists and experts worldwide have agreed the benefits of their administration far outweigh any risks.

Manufacturers also started mass producing these vaccines while they were still in testing. This is different than the usual procedure, which is typically less costly for manufacturers but takes much more time. This strategy allowed millions of vaccines to be available the moment their safety was approved, saving months of production time. This has never been done before and could be a key component to getting more people vaccinated sooner and saving more lives.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Common side effects include pain or soreness at the injection site, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, joint pain, and in rare cases a high fever (102F). Side effects occur because the body is preparing its immune response (antibodies). This happens with all vaccines and is not a sign that you have caught the virus from the vaccine.

Respiratory symptoms are not an anticipated side effect, which means you should notify your provider(s) immediately if they occur. We encourage you to talk to your provider(s) about their clinical experience with the vaccine.

Who is paying for the vaccine?

Vaccines are covered by the government, but there may be an administrative fee which would be billed to insurance (generally less than $30).

What if I already had a COVID-19 infection? Do I still need the vaccine?

We do not know how long immunity lasts after an infection, but we do know that this immunity is not permanent. You should still get the vaccine even if you've already had COVID-19, but you should wait until you are out of the isolation or acute phase of infection (generally 10 days).

Common Myths About the COVID-19 Vaccine

The COVID-19 vaccine will cause infertility.

False. The mRNA protein that helps your cells prepare antibodies for the COVID-19 virus breaks down quickly and is not permanent. It does not affect your cells long term and cannot change or affect your DNA.

The COVID-19 vaccine carries a microchip that will be put into my body.

False. Vaccines are not and have never been vehicles for putting nanotechnology into your body.

Once I get the vaccine, I can stop worrying about COVID-19 and needing to wearing a mask.

False. The COVID-19 vaccine will help improve public immunity as more and more get vaccinated, but the virus itself will not disappear overnight. Similarly, no vaccine is 100% effective, which means there is a small chance you could still catch the virus even after getting vaccinated. This means you could be carrying the virus without realizing it (if you don't feel sick) and unintentionally infecting other people.

For now, you should continue to wear masks in public and avoid large groups of people/ gatherings to protect yourself and others.

One Final Point

If a woman is pregnant or might be trying to get pregnant, they should discuss their options with their provider before getting the vaccine. Initial research has shown that the vaccine should not harm the fetus. Likewise, the CDC has not forbidden the vaccine during pregnancy. But you should still talk with your provider ahead of time before receiving the vaccine.

For additional information, contact your healthcare provider or visit the CDC website:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html#Getting