What You Need to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines

Revised Aug. 10, 2021 | This information is approved by Medical Staff Serving on the Pandemic Incident Command team at Upland Hills Health in Dodgeville WI: Dr. Charlie Pearce, Dr. Sarah Fox and Dr. Rachel Hartline

Vaccines to prevent the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) are perhaps the best hope for ending the pandemic. This article will review safety of the COVID-19 vaccines, how they work and the possible side effects of vaccines.

1) These vaccines have been approved. Other vaccines may follow. [cdc.gov]

- The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine
- Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine
- Janssen's COVID-19 vaccine

2) Data shows two vaccines are over 94% effective.

Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Authorized by the FDA for emergency use. Data has shown that this vaccine starts working soon after the first dose and has an efficacy rate of 95% seven days after the second dose. This means that about 95% of people who get the vaccine are protected from becoming seriously ill with the virus. This vaccine requires two injections given 21 days apart.

Moderna vaccine. Moderna has been authorized by the FDA for emergency use authorization of its COVID-19 vaccine. Data has shown that the vaccine has an efficacy rate of 94.1%. This vaccine requires two injections given 28 days apart. [mayoclinic.org]

3) COVID-19 vaccines will not give you COVID-19.

The vaccines do not use a live virus that causes COVID-19. The goal for the vaccine is to teach our immune system to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. Sometimes this process can cause symptoms, such as fever. These symptoms are normal and are a sign that your body is building immunity. [mayoclinic.org]

4) A COVID-19 vaccine may cause mild side effects.

Most people do not have serious problems after being vaccinated. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is doing exactly what it should do. It is building up protection to the disease. These side effects usually go away on their own within a week. [cdc.gov]

Side effects may include: Pain, redness or swelling where the shot was given, Fever, Fatigue, Headache, Muscle pain, Chills, Joint pain [mayoclinic.org]

Most reactions happen with the first few days after vaccination and last no more than three days. If you experience side effects after getting a COVID-19 vaccine, it doesn't mean that you have COVID-19. If you develop a fever after receiving the vaccine, stay home. Take time to rest and recover. It is not necessary to get a COVID-19 test or quarantine. [mayoclinic.org]

5) Serious side effects are less likely.

Signs of an allergic reaction include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, and weakness. If you have any of these signs, seek care immediately.

If you have a reaction that prevents you from being able to eat, sleep or work, contact your doctor. Also, contact your doctor if you have a reaction that lasts longer than three days. [mayoclinic.org]

6) The safety of the COVID-19 vaccines is a top priority.

The COVID-19 vaccines were tested in large clinical trials to make sure they meet safety standards. Many people were recruited to participate in these trials to see how the vaccines protect people of different ages, races, ethnicities and different medical conditions. [cdc.gov]

7) COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you from getting COVID-19. Two doses are needed.

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine can help protect you by creating an antibody response in your body without your having to become sick with COVID-19. Or, if you get COVID-19, the vaccine might keep you from becoming seriously ill or from developing serious complications that may lead to death. [mayoclinic.org]

You will need two doses of the Pfeizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. A second shot 3-4 weeks after your first shot is needed to get the most protection the vaccine has to offer against this serious disease. [cdc.gov]

8) Getting vaccinated may protect people around you from COVID-19.

This is particularly important for people at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. [cdc.gov]

9) Vaccine DOSES ARE FREE to American people.

The vaccine doses are free. There may be a fee for giving the shot. This fee will likely be covered by your health insurance plan. If you do not have insurance, it may be paid by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund. [cdc.gov]

10) Talk to your physician about individual risks vs. benefits of receiving the vaccine.

The Pfizer vaccine is approved for anyone over age 16.
The Moderna vaccine is approved for anyone over age 18.

Those who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or have other chronic health conditions including a history of anaphylaxis should talk with their physician about their individual risk/benefit of getting the vaccine.

11) People who have had COVID-19 should still get vaccinated

Getting COVID-19 may offer some natural protection, known as immunity, but experts do not know how long this protection lasts, and the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 outweighs any benefits of natural immunity. [cdc.gov]

12) Getting vaccinated is safer than getting COVID-19

Scientists are still learning about the virus that causes COVID-19. The severity of the disease is unpredictable; it has caused serious illness and death for many people. You do not know how sick you will get. If you get sick, you also risk giving it to loved ones who may get very sick. Scientists do not know what the long-term effects from having COVID-19 are after you recover. It is not known if getting the disease will protect you from getting it again. Getting the COVID-19 vaccine is a safer choice. [cdc.gov]

13) Vaccinated people still need to wear a mask

It is possible for vaccinated people to carry the virus without developing symptoms and silently transmit the virus. If vaccinated people are silent spreaders of the virus, they may keep it circulating in their communities, putting unvaccinated people at risk. [mayoclinic.org]