

COVID-19 Vaccines: Frequently Asked Questions

Vaccination is one of the most important tools to end the COVID-19 pandemic. See below for answers to common questions about the vaccines, including information on COVID-19 vaccines for youth.

1. Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.

Millions of people in the United States (U.S.) have received COVID-19 vaccines under the most intense safety monitoring in U.S. history. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends you get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you are eligible. If you have a history of allergic reactions to vaccines, ask your doctor to help you decide about the COVID-19 vaccine.

2. How were COVID-19 vaccines developed so quickly?

Vaccine makers had the resources they needed very quickly.

The global health community came together to fight this pandemic. Early funding was given to vaccine makers which helped scientists transform years of research into safe and effective vaccines. They shared data as they worked. They used new technologies. All of these factors helped scientists quickly produce a safe and effective vaccine. To view a timeline of the COVID-19 vaccine development, [click here](#).

3. How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

The vaccines teach your body to recognize COVID-19 so it is prepared to fight it.

The Pfizer-BioNTech™ and Moderna™ vaccines are [messenger RNA vaccines \(mRNA\)](#). mRNA provides the instructions your body needs to build a small protein that looks like a piece of COVID-19. This helps your body recognize the virus if you become infected. This protects you, and helps kill the virus before you can spread it to others. [Viral vector vaccines](#), like Janssen™, also provide instructions to build the spike protein found on the surface of COVID-19. However, this type of vaccine uses a harmless strand of another virus to deliver the instructions.

4. How do I find out if I am eligible?

Check the COVID-19 vaccine webpage: coronavirus-sd.com/vaccine.

As of May 13, 2021, everyone 12 years old and above is now eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals younger than 18 can only receive the Pfizer-BioNTech™ (Pfizer™) COVID-19 vaccine. Check the vaccine webpage for the latest information.

5. How much do COVID-19 vaccinations cost?

COVID-19 vaccines are provided at no cost.

Check first to see if you can receive the vaccine from the provider you normally go to. If they are not offering it, or you don't have a regular provider, the County can provide the vaccine. You can drop in or schedule a vaccination through the County website. Insurance is not required to receive the vaccine; vaccines are provided at no cost.

6. If I already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need the vaccine?

Yes, the CDC recommends you get vaccinated, even if you had COVID-19.

The CDC recommends vaccination even if you have recovered from COVID-19 infection because we do not know how long immunity last. While there is no recommended minimum interval between infection and vaccination, current evidence suggests that the risk of getting infected again is low in the months after initial infection, but may increase with time due to decreasing immunity.

7. Do I still have to wear a mask after I receive the vaccine?

Yes, you should follow all COVID-19 safety habits and public health recommendations.

Vaccines provide strong protection against infection. However, we still have spread of COVID-19 and not enough people have been vaccinated to achieve herd immunity (“community immunity”). Masks are an extra protective measure recommended for some settings, especially indoors, since fully vaccinated people can still get COVID-19, although very rare.

8. What is herd immunity? How many people does it take to achieve it?

When enough people become immune to a disease, it makes its spread less likely. Vaccines are our best tool to help protect people from disease. The vaccines teach our bodies how to fight off diseases, such as COVID-19. The more people who are vaccinated, the more our community is protected, even those who are not immune themselves. This community-wide protection is herd or community immunity. Herd immunity varies from disease to disease. We don’t know yet exactly how many people will need the vaccine to build herd immunity from COVID-19. It may vary depending on the type of variants in circulation. This is why it is important to vaccinate as many as possible and follow all safety measures to slow the spread and not allow time for the virus to form new variants.

9. I never get sick. Why do I need the vaccine?

People can appear healthy, and still carry the COVID-19 virus and spread it to others.

If you never get an infection, then you can’t accidentally spread it to family, friends, classmates, or co-workers. Becoming vaccinated helps your body fight the virus, making you much less likely to get the virus and spread it to others. Some people cannot get the vaccine, including children and individuals with chronic disease who are at risk for complications from the virus, so being vaccinated helps protect them. Additionally, vaccines are not approved yet for people less than 12 years of age. Ultimately, certain people will remain at risk. Ending this pandemic takes a community effort.

10. Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for pregnant women?

Many pregnant women have safely received the vaccine.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to monitor the data and no safety concerns have been noted to either the pregnant women or the fetus. However, pregnant women weren’t included in the first clinical trials. There are now clinical trials in progress to confirm the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnant women. Some women who participated in the initial trials later became pregnant and did not suffer harmful reactions. Pregnant women should consult with their healthcare providers to decide if they should receive the vaccine.

11. Can children receive the vaccine?

People 12 years and older are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

The Pfizer-BioNTech™ COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for people 12 years and older. Over two thousand participants ages 12-15 years old were involved in the Pfizer-BioNTech™ clinical trial and results showed 100% effectiveness. Data also showed that the vaccine had no safety issues with 2 or more months of follow-up. A strong immune response was reported in 12-15 year olds, as compared to 16-25 year olds. COVID-19 vaccines from Moderna™ and Janssen™ are approved for people 18 years and older. Clinical trials are currently in progress for children 6 months to 11 years of age. Soon, we will learn much more.

12. Do minors need consent from parents or legal guardians?

Yes, eligible minors do need consent from their parent or legal guardian to be vaccinated.

Consent may either occur in-person at the vaccination site OR be given in advance when scheduling appointments on [MyTurn.ca.gov](https://myturn.ca.gov).

13. Do minors need to show proof of eligibility?

Yes, in addition to parental consent minors will need to show a photo ID (e.g., school ID) AND proof of age, or have the parent, guardian or caregiver who accompanies the minor to the appointment to verify their age and identity.

Documentation examples include:

- Birth certificate or passport
- Provisional Driver's Permit (Learner's Permit)

14. Why should my child get a vaccine if COVID-19 doesn't affect them as much?

Children can appear healthy, and still carry the COVID-19 virus and spread it to others.

Becoming vaccinated helps your body fight the virus, so you are less likely to spread it to others, even if you do get infected. Youth that do not get that sick from COVID-19 infection can still suffer from long haul COVID-19 (symptoms that last weeks or months after first being infected), as well as multisystem inflammatory syndrome, although very rare.

If you do get infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 disease, you can spread the virus up to 2 days before you get symptoms, if you get symptoms at all. This may also lead to spreading the virus to others, including people who may be more medically vulnerable.

15. Can schools require COVID-19 vaccines for students?

No, at this time, the state of California is not requiring that schools mandate students to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

According to the California School Boards Association, the state does have the authority to require the vaccine in the future for K-12 students. Some K-12 private schools, colleges and universities may also require the vaccine in the future, once the vaccines receive full U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval.

16. Will booster shots be needed for the vaccine?

We do not know yet, but it is possible booster shots may be needed in the future.

We know the mRNA vaccines have strong data to suggest that they are still very protective at 6 months post vaccination and likely longer. Longer-term data will tell us if or when that protection lessens. Vaccine effectiveness and spread of variants will be monitored over time. These data will help scientists and public health officials determine when booster shots may be needed.

17. If you have a medical condition, can you get the vaccine?

People with most medical conditions can receive COVID-19 vaccines.

Some individuals with certain pre-existing conditions are at a higher risk of severe illness if they get the coronavirus. Receiving the vaccine is almost always less of a health risk than getting COVID-19. If you have a concern about risks, consult with your doctor.

18. Are there side effects?

When you are vaccinated, there are some mild side effects that go away in a day or two. Side effects are a sign that the vaccine is working.

Side effects could include:

- Your arm may be sore where you received the shot. You can apply a cool, wet washcloth to reduce pain.
- You may also experience mild flu symptoms, like chills, headache and fever. You can drink plenty of fluids and dress lightly. Rest will also help your body recover.

If your side effects are worrying you or don't seem to be going away, consult with your doctor.

19. Is it possible to be allergic to the vaccine?

Allergic reactions are extremely rare, but they are possible. After you receive the vaccine, you will stay at the vaccination site for a brief time in case you have an immediate reaction.

- People with a history of severe allergic reactions or who meet other criteria will be monitored for at least 30 minutes.
- All other people will be monitored for at least 15 minutes after getting the vaccine.

During this time, you will be told to pay attention to signs of an allergic reaction. These could include a swollen tongue or throat, or difficulty breathing. Vaccination providers will have medications and equipment on site to treat reactions. These supplies can include epinephrine, antihistamines, stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, and timing devices to check your pulse.

20. Who are the best sources of information if I have more questions?

Your healthcare provider team is the best source to address questions you have about the vaccine and your own health risks.

You may hear different ideas about the vaccine in the community and on social media. It is natural to turn to close friends and family when we have concerns. However, it is best to ask a health care professional if you have questions, so you are getting answers based on evidence. You can also go to trusted sources, such as the [County of San Diego](#), the [California Department of Public Health](#), or the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Updates to guidance and information are made on all of these web resources as they become available.