



COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Is the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory?

- No, you will not be required to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Many employers may strongly recommend it, but some others will not (Dakota County employees, for example, will not be required to receive the vaccine). Some of the first COVID-19 vaccines are under the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). Under an EUA, employers cannot require employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Once the vaccines are fully approved by the FDA, employers can require team members be vaccinated. Check with your employer to learn more.

What is Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)?

- Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines received emergency use authorization, or EUA. Normally, the vaccine approval process takes years, since there may be existing alternatives that people can use. Unfortunately, with COVID-19, there are no acceptable or available alternatives available – and the virus spreads very quickly, hurting millions of people. Because of this, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued EUA to vaccines that worked really well without major side effects. All vaccines that receive EUA have been strictly tested and continue to receive ongoing safety monitoring.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine free?

- Yes. The COVID-19 vaccine will be offered at no cost to you. There may be a fee that your insurance will be billed, but no payment is required from you. If someone is asking you to pay in any way or for your bank/credit account information, be cautious of scams.

When will I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- The vaccine will be given out in steps or phases. The phases are determined by state and local health experts and are based on vaccinating the people who are the highest risk of spreading the disease and those who are at highest risk of getting very sick from the disease.
- The COVID-19 delivery steps/phases are based on many things, like the number of vaccines available, the number of health and long-term care groups in an area, the ability for national and state governments to ship the vaccine quickly, and many other components. These are the guidelines that many states and communities are following:
 - Phase 1a (December – February): Healthcare professionals and long-term care residents (nurses, doctors, seniors in group homes, and staff at these facilities)
 - Phase 1b (February – April): Essential workers (education, food and agriculture, police, firefighters, transportation, etc.) and older adults
 - Phase 1c (March – April): High-risk adults with medical conditions (people with diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, etc.)
 - Phase 2 (April – July): All adults over 18 years old
 - Phase 3 (July – onward): Everyone, including children

*Due to the distribution process being brand new, timing and grouping may change based on factors like vaccine availability, the number of high-risk people in your community, shipping logistics, and many other unforeseen components



Where can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- Once it's your turn to get the vaccine, you will be able to get it from many different places. Hospitals and local clinics, like your doctor's office, will be offering the vaccine, along with clinics held at local government centers, like our Dakota County Service Centers. As more vaccine is available, we expect there will be larger drive-up and walk-in clinics that will be able to vaccinate hundreds of people each day. If you think it's your turn to get the vaccine, and don't know where to go, call the state's COVID-19 hotline: 1-800-657-3504.

How many shots of the vaccine do I need to be protected? How fast does the vaccine work?

- Many vaccines, like the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, require two shots/doses. The shots will need to be given 3 or 4 weeks apart, depending on the vaccine you get. The person giving you your vaccine will tell you when to come back for your second shot. If you don't get your second shot, you may not be fully protected. COVID-19 vaccines that require 2 doses may not protect you fully until a week or two after your second shot.
- As time goes on, we will also have to evaluate whether booster shots would be needed, like needing a tetanus shot every 10 years or getting a flu shot every year.

If someone has had COVID-19 can they get sick again?

- Yes, people can get COVID-19 more than once. Studies and reports from around the world have indicated the people can get COVID-19, recover, and then test positive for COVID-19 months later. Because of this, it's important that everyone continue to wear a mask and keep 6 feet of distance between others in public to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Should someone who has already had COVID-19 get the vaccine?

- Yes, it is recommended that everyone get the COVID-19 vaccine, even if they've gotten sick and recovered. People have gotten COVID-19 more than once. There is not enough information currently available to say if, or for how long after infection, someone is protected from getting COVID-19 again; this is called natural immunity. Early evidence suggests natural immunity from COVID-19 may not last very long, but more studies are needed to better understand this. By getting the vaccine, people will be more protected against the virus and will have better outcomes if they get infected.

How long will the COVID-19 vaccine protect me?

- Healthcare professionals and researchers are still learning about COVID-19 and new information is discovered nearly every day that is helpful in the fight against this disease. Because COVID-19 is still a relatively new virus, it is difficult to know exactly how the virus affects the body long-term and how long immunity from natural infection lasts. Therefore, it is also difficult to predict how long a vaccine will provide protection against the virus. As time goes on, we will also have to evaluate whether booster doses would be needed, like needing a tetanus shot every 10 years or getting a flu shot every year.



Should kids get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- Not yet. The first COVID-19 vaccines will not be given to children. The first vaccines were created and studied on people who were most at risk, not including children. New studies are being expanded to include children. When those results are learned, they will be shared publicly, and then with CDC approval and guidance, we would expect to vaccinate children.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

- After receiving the vaccine, you may have some side effects, which are normal signs that your body is building protection. These side effects may feel like flu (fever, chills, tiredness, and headache) and may even affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. Pain and swelling in your arm where the vaccine was given is also common. People who have experienced severe reactions to prior vaccines, or injectable drugs, can still get the vaccine but should talk with their doctor or healthcare provider about the risks before receiving it.

How can I report side effects of the vaccine that I'm feeling?

- The COVID-19 vaccine will be continually studied for side effects and other reporting. If you receive the vaccine, you can help researchers by downloading the CDC's [v-safe mobile app](#) onto your smartphone. With the mobile app, you can use your phone to report any side effects and get reminders for when you need your second dose.

What can I do now as I wait for the vaccine?

- Continue to help slow the spread of COVID-19: Wear a mask, wash your hands often, stay 6 feet away from other people, and stay home if you are sick. Doing all these things will help keep people healthy until a vaccine is widely available.
- You can also get a flu vaccine. While the flu vaccine does not protect against COVID-19, it can save lives and prevent more illness during the COVID-19 pandemic. People need to do everything they can to stay healthy and not overwhelm our health care system. To find where you can get a flu vaccine, visit [VaccineFinder](#).

I heard the COVID-19 vaccine is mRNA, what does that mean? Is it safe?

- Messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines teach our bodies how to fight off COVID-19. Unlike other vaccines, mRNA does not use live or dead COVID-19 virus. mRNA vaccines are new, and until COVID-19, had not been used before. This is not because mRNA vaccines weren't safe, it was because the technology needed to create them did not exist. Even though Messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines are new, they are very safe. mRNA vaccines are held to the same high safety standards and requirements as all other vaccines in the United States.



What's the difference between mRNA vaccines and other vaccines?

- Both Messenger RNA (mRNA) and existing vaccines help our bodies fight off disease by creating proteins that act as “watch guards”. When a bad virus enters our body, “watch guard” proteins will see it and tell our body to destroy it, protecting us. If we don’t have the right proteins to signal our body, viruses can spread, and we can get sick. To fight COVID-19, our bodies need a very special “watch guard” protein. mRNA vaccines teach our bodies how to make these special proteins, by giving our cells the directions or blueprints. Other types of vaccines teach a different way – instead of giving our cells directions, they show our bodies a very small version of the virus and let our bodies create the special protein on our own. All vaccines are good since they help us create the special proteins that protect us.

Do mRNA vaccines change your DNA?

- Messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines do not change your DNA.

I heard the COVID-19 vaccine must be kept cold, does Dakota County have a deep freezer?

- Yes, Dakota County has ordered and installed a deep freezer, also called an ultra- cold freezer, that will keep the COVID-19 vaccines at the temperatures that they need to be stored at. The Pfizer vaccine does require temperatures below -90 degrees Fahrenheit. All vaccines are warmed up before being given to people.

Is the vaccine safe for pregnant women and women trying to conceive?

- Pregnant women and women trying to conceive should have a discussion with their healthcare provider about risks and benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine. Pregnant women and women trying to conceive were not included in the first round of clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccines, so no safety data is currently available for these groups. However, CDC recommends that pregnant women consider their personal risk of contracting COVID-19 by occupation or other activities, as well as considering the risk of COVID-19 to her and her pregnancy and known side effects of the vaccine when deciding whether to be vaccinated.

When will herd immunity happen?

- Experts do not know what percentage of people would need to get vaccinated to achieve herd immunity to COVID-19. Herd immunity is a term used to describe when enough people have protection—either from previous infection or vaccination—that it is unlikely a virus or bacteria can spread and cause disease in a community. As a result, everyone within the area is protected even if some people don’t have any protection themselves. The percentage of people who need to have protection in order to achieve herd immunity varies by disease. We cannot let herd immunity happen naturally, at the cost of thousands of Minnesotans getting very sick and possibly dying. Vaccination is a way to reach herd immunity without people getting sick and/or dying. Vaccination lets a person's body develop protection against a disease without having to get sick.



When will the pandemic end?

- When most of the population has been vaccinated or recovered from the virus. The pandemic will continue until most people in Dakota County, Minnesota, and the world get vaccinated and as more trials and studies are conducted. As time goes on, we will also have to evaluate whether future COVID-19 vaccines and doses will be needed.