COVID-19 Vaccine Questions Answered

With multiple COVID-19 vaccines now available in the U.S., now is the time to consider scheduling a vaccine appointment.

WE KNOW YOU HAVE QUESTIONS — and we have the most up-to-date answers and CDC recommendations. Below are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions. This information has been reviewed and approved by The Christ Hospital Health Network's infectious diseases physicians and by me, your provider. I'm happy to answer any other questions you have about the various vaccines and assist in getting you scheduled.

The Christ Hospital™ Health Network

Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccine is the only way to get durable immunity to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is the virus that causes COVID-19, without getting sick. This includes protection against currently known virus variants.

With many businesses and activities now open, the COVID-19 vaccine offers you the best protection against the virus. Being vaccinated also protects others around you, such as children who are not eligible for the vaccine yet or people with weakened immune systems.

How will a COVID-19 vaccine make me immune to SARS-CoV-2?

Like other vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccine works with your natural immune system to make antibodies (proteins that stick to and fight off foreign substances like viruses and bacteria). If you're exposed to SARS-CoV-2 after getting the COVID-19 vaccine, these antibodies will protect you from getting seriously ill.

Keep in mind that immunity does not begin right away. According to the CDC, it typically takes 14 days after being fully vaccinated for the vaccine to have full effect. For the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, that means two weeks after your second vaccine dose. For Johnson & Johnson, immunity goes into effect two weeks after your single vaccine dose.

Is it safe for my child to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

In early May, the FDA authorized the two-dose Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for adolescents ages 12-15. Vaccinating children ages 12 and older will help protect them during school, sports activities and social events – and keep them from transmitting the virus to others who are at higher risk of complications.

Additionally, even though children and adolescents experience a milder form of COVID-19, severe illness and hospitalization are possible — which is why vaccine protection is critical. Between March 1, 2020, and April 30, 2021, more than 1.5 million COVID-19 cases were reported in 11-17-year-olds.

The Pfizer vaccine clinical trials showed >99% effectiveness in preventing COVID-19 in children ages 12 and older. Side effects remain the same as in adults and older teens: pain at the injection site, headache, chills, fatigue and fever. Speak with your child's physician if you have questions or concerns before scheduling your child for a vaccination appointment. Usually any side effects from a vaccine appear within six weeks. The FDA required two months of data on safety after the final vaccine dose was given before authorizing it for use. Major side effects are extremely rare and the FDA continues to monitor for any side effects should they happen.

Do I still wear a mask in public after getting the vaccine?

Mask guidelines may change during the course of the pandemic. Stay up to date on CDC and state/regional guidelines — and always make responsible decisions when interacting with unvaccinated individuals — including children. Masks are still required for specific situations, such as nursing homes, hospitals, some schools, and certain businesses (as of the date of this printing). Keep your mask with you and when in doubt, put it on to help keep others safe.

Can't I just get natural immunity by getting COVID-19?

It's true that our immune systems naturally make COVID-19 antibodies from exposure to SARS-CoV-2. However, the COVID-19 vaccine will allow you to make these antibodies without the risk of getting seriously ill.

I've already had COVID-19. Do I need to get the vaccine?

Yes, you should receive the COVID-19 vaccine even if you've already had the illness. We're still not exactly sure how long natural immunity lasts or how effective natural immunity is at protecting us from reinfection. Natural infection also has not been shown to protect against virus variants as well.

What does "FDA approval for emergency use" mean?

In the U.S., new vaccines must be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before they can be given to the general public. The FDA strictly regulates the development and use of new vaccines through a careful scientific process that ensures safety, effectiveness and quality. This process includes completing three phases of clinical trials before a vaccine can be approved for use.

In a public health emergency, the FDA allows vaccine manufacturers to submit a request for an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) before completing phase 3 testing. The FDA and other external scientific and public health experts review the EUA. If strict safety criteria are met, they give the go-ahead for the vaccine to be used before formal approval has been given.

It's important to note that the COVID-19 vaccines that have been authorized for emergency use had to reach a certain stage in phase 3 testing before they could even be considered for EUA. And they still must complete phase 3 testing and pursue formal approval from the FDA.

How have COVID-19 vaccines been developed so quickly?

The seriousness of the pandemic helped governments, medical and scientific experts, and private investors come together to accelerate the development of vaccines. The J&J vaccine is a type of viral vector vaccine that uses a technology first developed in the 1970s. The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are mRNA vaccines made with a technology that has been in development for over 30 years.

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe for everyone?

COVID-19 vaccines are safe. Vaccine trials were conducted worldwide with tens of thousands of individuals from all ethnic backgrounds and ages. The vaccines currently approved for use in the U.S. meet the FDA's strict safety, effectiveness and manufacturing quality standards.

Since December 2020, millions of people in the United States have received these vaccines.

Is the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine available again?

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine was paused temporarily after a small number of reports that people who got the J&J vaccine developed an extremely rare blood clotting disorder. Out of an abundance of caution, the FDA and CDC recommended a temporary pause in using the vaccine.

As of April 23, 2021, the pause has been lifted and the J&J vaccine is once again being offered to Americans. However, women younger than 50 years old with low platelets should be aware of a rare complication of blood clots after vaccination.

Do COVID-19 vaccines have any side effects?

Side effects may include soreness, redness or swelling at the site of injection, fatigue, headache, muscle pain and mild fever. These reactions are almost always a normal sign that your body's immune response is working as it should. Younger people may be more prone to side effects – probably because they have a more robust immune system. If you're receiving a version of the vaccine that requires two doses (Pfizer and Moderna), you may experience more side effects after your second shot. Call your doctor if you're concerned about your side effects.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for women who are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or breastfeeding?

While pregnant women were not included in the early COVID-19 vaccine studies, there is no data so far showing that the vaccine is harmful to this group. However, getting sick with COVID-19 while pregnant does have a higher risk than in non-pregnant individuals. The CDC recommends that pregnant women consider their risk of COVID-19 exposure, the risk of severe illness, the proven benefits of vaccination and growing evidence that vaccines are safe during pregnancy.

The American Society for Reproductive Medicine has also emphasized that mRNA vaccines "are not thought to cause an increased risk of infertility, first or second-trimester loss, stillbirth, or congenital anomalies." For these reasons, pregnant women may choose to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Women who are breastfeeding may also choose to receive the vaccine (with no disruption to their breastfeeding schedule).

If you're pregnant or breastfeeding, talk to your doctor about the vaccine and any concerns you may have. They can provide you with more information and answer your questions. Be sure to ask for the most up-to-date information on receiving an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer and Moderna) versus a viral vector vaccine (Johnson & Johnson). Pregnant mothers who receive the vaccine can also join the CDC v-safe program, a voluntary study on pregnancy and the COVID-19 vaccine.

How do I schedule a vaccine?

For information on how to schedule your COVID-19 vaccine appointment, visit TheChristHospital.com/COVID-Vaccine or ask your provider.

CDC and FDA resources:

- COVID-19 Vaccines for Children and Teens
- Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine Overview and Safety
- CDC Director Statement on Pfizer's Use of COVID-19 Vaccine in
- Adolescents Age 12 and Older
- FDA EAU Pfizer vaccine approval for ages 12-15
- CDC Guidelines: When You've Been Fully Vaccinated
- Pregnancy and the COVID-19 vaccine
- J&J COVID-19 vaccine usage
- What to expect after the COVID-19 vaccine
- COVID Vaccines In Teens And Heart Inflammation: What You Need To Know: Shots - Health News: NPR