

COVID -19 Vaccine FAQs

A safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is a critical component of the U.S. strategy to reduce COVID-19-related illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths.

Easy access to COVID-19 vaccines is equally important. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working with public health departments, health care providers, and other partners to make sure people can easily get a COVID-19 vaccine and that cost is not a barrier. Within Illinois, the CDC recognizes the state and the city of Chicago as separate jurisdictions for the distribution of vaccine. Both Illinois and Chicago, however, are collaborating to ensure that vaccines are delivered and available in accordance with the CDC guidelines and recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

Vaccine availability

Q. When can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

A. The first supply of COVID-19 vaccine receiving Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began being distributed in the U.S. on December 14, 2020. Initial supplies of the vaccine will be limited, and therefore allocated to health care personnel and Long-term care (LTC) residents and staff. However, the vaccine supply will increase over time and all adults should be able to be vaccinated in 2021. (To view the categories of priority populations in Phase 1a, please see the chart below.)

Q. Where can I get the vaccine?

A. Initially, hospitals will provide COVID-19 vaccine to health care personnel. As more vaccine is distributed by the federal government, several thousand vaccination providers will be available, including but not limited to doctors' offices, retail pharmacies, hospitals, and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), across the state.

CDC is working with pharmacies to establish a system to offer on-site COVID-19 vaccination services to residents and staff in LTC settings, including skilled nursing facilities, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities where most individuals are over 65 years of age.

Q. Will the state (or federal government) establish mass immunization programs, like they did in the 1960's?

A. Illinois is working with local health departments and providers across the state to provide COVID-19 vaccinations that resemble larger versions of yearly flu clinics, rather than the mass vaccination activities of the past.

Q. My family member was offered a vaccine through their employer. Why can't the rest of my family get the vaccine?

A. Because vaccine will be very limited when it first comes out, administration will be limited to those identified in prioritized (high-risk) groups by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the CDC. This is to ensure that all individuals in the

high-risk groups are able to receive the vaccine. As more vaccine becomes available, those groups eligible to receive the vaccine will expand.

Q. Is there a scheduled date for distribution per phases?

A. There is not a scheduled calendar date, but once ACIP provides its recommendation on priority vaccination groups, IDPH will distribute vaccine to Regional Hospital Coordinating Centers (RHCC) partners throughout the state. From there, the distribution will continue ultimately through local health departments to local health care providers.

Q. Will distribution of vaccine be divided per capita?

A. Vaccine will be distributed according to the population of each county, adjusted to ensure health equity using the COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index (CCVI).

Q. What about one municipality that has very high numbers of COVID-19 cases within a county that otherwise had less cases? (in reference to prioritizing vaccine distribution)

A. Distribution within counties will be overseen by local health departments (LHD). IDPH will work with LHDs to ensure providers have adequate amounts of vaccine to support the municipalities/communities they serve.

Q. I understand the vaccination requires two shots. Why, and what if I am unable (or do not want) to get a second shot?

A. The currently available COVID-19 vaccines require two shots to be fully effective. This helps make sure that enough antibodies are being produced to provide effective and long-lasting protection. We do not know if receiving only one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is protective. If you choose not to get a second dose, you may reduce the effectiveness of the vaccine. The first dose of the vaccine will provide some protection, but the recommendation is to receive two doses to be protected as intended.

Q. Different COVID-19 vaccines are expected to be available. Which vaccine should I take?

A. Any COVID-19 vaccine authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is expected to be effective. Data available at this point would suggest that the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are very similar in their abilities to produce immunity to the virus. The recommendation would be to take whatever vaccine is made available to you and be sure to receive the booster shot of that same vaccine at the appropriate time. If you choose not to get a second dose, you may reduce the effectiveness of the vaccine.

Q. What happens if they run out of the vaccine before I get my second shot?

A. CDC is structuring shipments in such a way that 21 or 28 days after the first shipment, the same number of doses will be shipped, so providers will have enough vaccine for a second dose. The 21- or 28-day requirement between doses is a minimum requirement, not a maximum. If, for some reason, you are unable to receive the second dose at the recommended interval, you can receive the second dose at a later date.

Q. Who besides healthcare workers will be able to administer the vaccine? For example, we recently passed a law allowing dentists to administer flu shots. Will dentists, pharmacists and other qualified professionals, besides doctors and nurses, be able to administer the vaccine?

A. IDPH licenses EMTs and CNAs. All other healthcare professionals including but not limited to doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists are licensed by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR). Currently dentists, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians have had their scope of practice extended by IDFPR to allow them to administer the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available. IDPH has issued recommendations to allow EMT's at the advanced and intermediate levels to administer vaccine, as long as their Medical Director for their EMS system follows certain guidelines.

Vaccine Requirements/Mandates

Q. Do I have to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

A. There is no federal or state mandate to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. The CDC recommends the vaccine to all Americans 16 and over.

Q. Can my employer require that I receive a COVID-19 vaccine before returning to work?

A. Decisions regarding immunization at private workplaces are up to the employer.

Q. Are schools requiring students to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, similar to mumps and measles? Will restrictions be placed on my child if we refuse to vaccinate?

A. There is no requirement for students to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at this time. Currently, a pediatric vaccine is not available, and it may be some time before one is approved and becomes available.

Q. What happens if I refuse to get vaccinated?

A. There are no legal repercussions (such as fines, sanctions or punishments) for refusing the vaccine. If you do not get vaccinated, you will not be protected against the virus that causes COVID-19 and will be more likely to be infected with the virus. Additionally, you will be at risk of transmitting this deadly virus to loved ones and other community members.

Q. Do I need a vaccine if I have already had COVID-19?

A. Yes, people who have already had COVID-19 should plan to take the COVID-19 vaccine, because the science is currently inconclusive as to whether you will be naturally protected from a second COVID-19 infection in the future. The CDC currently suggests that if you were infected with COVID-19 during the previous 90 days, it is likely that you

still have immune protection and that you will be asked to wait to receive your vaccine to allow others to be vaccinated first.

Q. Do I have to get both the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine?

A. A seasonal flu vaccine will not protect you from COVID-19. Being infected with both the flu and COVID-19 at the same time could lead to a more severe illness, which is why it is more important now than ever to get the flu vaccine.

Vaccine Safety

Q. Is a COVID-19 vaccine safe?

A. The U.S. vaccine safety system is a deliberate and multi-phase process to ensure all vaccines are as safe as possible. Safety is a top priority. Vaccine candidates conduct clinical trials with many thousands of study participants to generate scientific data and other information for the FDA to determine their safety and effectiveness.

If the FDA determines a vaccine meets its safety and effectiveness standards, it can make these vaccines available for use in the U.S. by approval or Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). After the FDA makes its determination, ACIP will review the available data in order to make vaccine recommendations to the CDC. ACIP will then recommend vaccine use. After a vaccine is authorized or approved for use, vaccine safety monitoring systems will watch for adverse events (possible side effects). CDC is working to expand safety surveillance through new systems and additional information sources, as well as enhancing existing safety monitoring systems.

Q: How was the COVID-19 vaccine studied?

A: Each authorized COVID-19 vaccine has been studied in large trials of over 30,000 volunteers and shown to be highly effective in preventing COVID-19 disease. The trials involved people of different ages, sex, race/ethnicity, weight, and medical conditions.

Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems were excluded from the COVID-19 vaccine trials, and so the currently available studies do not provide direct information about vaccine safety and effectiveness in these groups of people. The CDC recommends that those who are pregnant consult with their doctor before taking the vaccine.

Q. Can the COVID-19 vaccine cause me to become infected or infect others?

A. No, you cannot become infected or infect others from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, because the vaccine contains no live virus. Instead, the vaccine directs your body to produce a protein that teaches your body how to fight off the virus.

Q. How long will it take for COVID-19 vaccines to take effect?

- A. The COVID-19 vaccine is expected to provide some protection a couple of weeks after your first shot and reaches its greatest effectiveness after your second shot. It is very important to take the second shot within the recommended time period for maximum vaccine effectiveness.

Q. What have the trials revealed?

- A. Through their respective clinical trials, Pfizer and Moderna have indicated their vaccines are approximately 95% effective.

Information gathered through clinical trials becomes public in the course of the EUA submission. Once the EUA is submitted, these documents become accessible by the public through the FDA.

Q. Can I get a COVID-19 vaccine if I am pregnant?

- A. Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems were excluded from the COVID-19 vaccine trials, and so the currently available studies do not provide direct information about vaccine safety and effectiveness in these groups of people. The CDC recommends that those who are pregnant consult with their doctor before taking the vaccine.

Q. Can children get a COVID-19 vaccine?

- A. Currently, a pediatric vaccine is not available, and it may be some time before one is approved and becomes available. Clinical trials need to be conducted with children before determining if the existing COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for them.

Q. Will youth with high risk conditions be included in any of the phases?

- A. The availability of a vaccine for youth, under the age of 16 years, will depend on the availability of a pediatric vaccine. Clinical trials need to be conducted with children before determining if the existing COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for them.

Q. When injected with the vaccine, are you injecting me with COVID-19?

- A. No, you are not being injected with the virus that causes COVID-19. None of the early COVID-19 vaccines tested in the U.S. use a live virus that causes COVID-19. The goal for each vaccine is to teach our immune systems how to recognize and to fight the virus that causes COVID-19. At this time, the vaccines closest to receiving approval are mRNA - messenger ribonucleic acid - vaccines. Like other vaccines, mRNA vaccines work by training the immune system to recognize a virus threat and begin producing antibodies to protect itself.

Q. After getting a flu shot, I always get the flu. Will this cause me to get COVID-19?

- A. No, you cannot become infected, or infect others, from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, because the vaccine contains no live virus. Instead, the vaccine directs your body to produce a protein that teaches your body how to fight off the virus. Some people develop

flu-like symptoms, such as mild fever and muscle aches, after getting a flu vaccination. These symptoms are not the same as having influenza.

Q. I have allergies. Is this vaccine safe for me?

A. While serious allergic reactions were not seen in vaccine clinical trials of thousands of patients, rare allergic reactions to vaccines are possible. If you have a history of serious allergic reactions, you should discuss your situation with your healthcare provider. The COVID-19 vaccine does not contain any animal products such as eggs.

Q. What are the side effects of this vaccine?

A. Some people may experience side effects, which are a part of the normal immune response to a vaccine. The majority of the side effects, while not seen in every individual, are signs that your body is recognizing the vaccine and mounting an immune response. Based on prior studies, side effects may include pain, redness and swelling at the site of the injection., fatigue, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, fever, nausea, malaise, and swollen lymph nodes. These symptoms may occur within 2 days after the shot and last 1 to 2 days. Side effects may be more frequent after the 2nd shot (booster) and less frequent among older adults

Long-term side effects are unknown, although most vaccines do not have long-term side effects. Vaccine studies are ongoing and will continue to monitor and watch for adverse events.

Q. It took four years to develop the mumps vaccine, how can the COVID-19 vaccine be safe and thoroughly tested so quickly?

A. Many things helped this vaccine get developed so rapidly. Significant resources were invested to fund the basic research and clinical trials, accelerating timelines greatly. Joining existing trial sites instead of developing new sites was a time saver. The virus has a good vaccination target and relatively low mutation rate. Additionally, the amount of infection in the communities allowed scientists to quickly compare vaccinated to unvaccinated populations and conclusively shows the vaccine worked. Last, but not least, are the huge number of brave volunteers willing to try the “novel” vaccines during the clinical trials.

Q. How long will the vaccine protect me from COVID-19? Will this be an annual vaccination, like the flu?

A. We are still learning about length of immunity. To determine how long protection lasts, follow-up studies are required to detect levels of both types of immune responses – antibody and T cell – as well as any repeated exposure risks. As more information becomes available, more information will be shared on the length of immunity.

Q. Can I get COVID-19 after the first dose of the vaccine?

A. Although the first dose of vaccine offers some immunity, you will still be considered susceptible to COVID-19. The first dose of the vaccine will provide some protection, but

the recommendation is to receive two doses to be protected as intended. Pfizer and Moderna have indicated their vaccines are approximately 95% effective.

Q. All the research indicates that I am at high risk for contracting COVID-19, yet I am not considered eligible for the vaccine. How is that fair?

A. The vaccine manufacturers, CDC, and the state are all committed to getting the vaccine to everyone as soon as possible. ACIP is a group of medical and public health experts that develop recommendations on how to use vaccines to control diseases in the U.S. ACIP decides on vaccine prioritization recommendations by reviewing the FDA information, clinical trial data, and other information. Initially, the limited supply of vaccine will only be available to those determined to be most at risk of exposure to COVID-19. As the vaccine supply increases, more people will be added to those prioritized until it is available to the adult population at large.

Q. Is this vaccine preservative free?

A. Yes. The vaccine candidates that are likely to be the first offered are preservative free.

Other

Q. How does the vaccine cause my body to be protected?

A. Your immune system makes antibodies to fight infections. The COVID-19 vaccine causes your body to make antibodies that target the COVID-19 virus. In the event that your body is exposed to the actual COVID-19 virus, the new antibodies prevent infection.

Q. I would like to know how we plan to roll out an educational campaign for vaccine.

A. Along with educational and communications campaigns from the federal government, the state will use multiple traditional, social, and community media platforms to communicate across Illinois. Providers, statewide, will be educated in the particular vaccine products after EUA approval, but before administering vaccine.

Q. Is a COVID-19 vaccine a guarantee that I will not get the virus?

A. Like any vaccine, there is no guarantee that you won't get the virus, but early indications are the vaccines under consideration are 90% -95% effective in protecting against COVID-19.

Q. How many people need to get vaccinated to have herd immunity to COVID-19?

A. The percentage of people who need to have protection in order to achieve herd immunity varies by disease. Experts do not know what percentage of people would need to get vaccinated to achieve herd immunity to COVID-19.

Q. What are the vaccine recommendations for children under age 16?

A. Until more studies are completed, a vaccine for children under 16 is not expected to be available in the immediate future.

Q. The vaccine is now available, when will we move to Phase 5 of the Restore Illinois plan? If not now, what is required to get to Phase 5?

A. At this time, we are not able to immediately move to Phase 5. The vaccine and/or a highly effective treatment needs to be widely available, and new cases need to be eliminated for a sustained period of time, before we can move to Phase 5 or we risk the possibility of increased cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.

Q. If I get the vaccine, can I quit wearing a mask?

A. No. While the COVID-19 vaccine is highly effective, it not 100% effective. Until the COVID-19 pandemic is controlled, people who receive the vaccine need to continue following Illinois Department of Public Health guidance such as the use of facemasks, social distancing, and regular hand washing. This protects you as well as your family and community.

Q. When will masking and social distancing be able to end, allowing us to get back to normal life?

A: Given the time it takes to get large quantities of the vaccine produced and distributed, we will need to continue our current mitigation practices for some time. It will remain important that vaccinated people continue to wear masks, practice social distancing and good hand hygiene to help prevent spread. Community infection rates will be continuously monitored and will be used to guide the decision process.

Q. What entity will be paying for the vaccines?

A. The US Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) will absorb the cost of the vaccines.

Q. Can the State purchase more?

A. There is no cost to the State for the vaccine. The federal government, through HHS and the CDC, oversees the allocation of vaccine to states.

Q. How much will this vaccine cost me? Is it covered by my insurance?

A. There is no cost for the vaccine. However, vaccination providers will be able to charge an administration fee for giving the shot. Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration at the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Q. Will the administrative fees be passed on to the patient in the form of a co-pay or deductible?

A. No.

Q. Will the manufacturing workers who were deemed essential also be in the first round?

A. We are awaiting final redocumentations from ACIP as to who will be in subsequent rounds of the vaccine.

What are the possible priority groups?

The current priority groups that have already been released by ACIP are as follows:

Phase	Population Group	Examples of individuals in priority population groups
1a	High risk workers in health care facilities	Physicians, nurses, respiratory technicians, dentists and hygienists, nursing assistants, assisted living facility staff, long-term care facility staff, group home staff, home caregivers, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), etc.
1a	Residents in Long Term Care (LTC) facilities	Adults who live in facilities that provide a variety of services including medical and personal care to persons who are unable to live independently.

Although additional information has yet to be released by ACIP, future priority groups could include:

- Workers in essential and critical industries
- People at high risk for severe COVID-19 illness due to underlying medical conditions
- People 65 years of age and older

Additional information on confirmed and potential priority groups can be found here:

Health care personnel continue to be on the front line of the nation’s fight against this deadly pandemic. By providing critical care to those infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, many health care personnel are at high risk of being exposed to and getting sick with COVID-19. Health care personnel who get COVID-19 can also spread the virus to patients seeking care for other medical conditions that, in turn, increase patients’ risk for severe COVID-19 illness. Early vaccine access is critical to ensuring the health and safety of this essential workforce of approximately 21 million people across the USA, protecting not only them but also their patients, communities, and the broader health of our country.

People with certain [underlying medical conditions](#) are at increased risk for severe COVID-19 illness, regardless of their age. Severe illness means that the person with COVID-19 may require

hospitalization, intensive care, or a ventilator to help them breathe, or that they are at increased risk of dying. Early vaccine access is essential to ensuring the health and safety of this population that is disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Among adults, the risk for severe illness and death from COVID-19 increases with age, with [older adults](#) considered to be at the highest risk. Early vaccine access is vital to help protect this population that has been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Workers in essential and critical industries are considered part of America's critical infrastructure, as defined by the [Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency](#). Current data show that many of these workers are at increased risk for getting COVID-19. Early vaccine access is to protect them in order to maintain the essential services they provide U.S. communities.

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/meetings/downloads/slides-2020-12/COVID-02-Dooling.pdf>