

COVID-19 UPDATE

Frequently Asked Questions

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Vaccine availability and related questions

1. *Is it okay to receive a different booster shot than the previous shot(s)? For e.g., is it okay to receive an mRNA version as booster after receiving the J&J vaccine first?*

From a safety standpoint this is probably OK. The UK has successfully implemented a “mix and match” vaccination program. But the newly announced booster shots in the United States are only authorized for the Pfizer vaccine. So, if you previously received two doses of Pfizer vaccine and are in one of the groups that is eligible for a booster – you can only be given Pfizer.

There is another concept of “third dose. Those who received two doses of the mRNA vaccines (Moderna or Pfizer) AND are immunosuppressed (weakened immune system from medications such as steroids or cancer chemotherapy) are recommended to get a third dose. This should preferably be the same mRNA vaccine as the one they received previously, but if unavailable the other mRNA is OK

2. *When will booster shots be available to all?*

The CDC recently announced booster recommendations for **those who are >6 months from completion of the Pfizer series**. The following are eligible for boosters (as of Sept 27, 2021)

Boosters strongly recommended for

- Those who are 65 years and older
- Adults of any age who live in a long term care facility
- Age 50-64 who have chronic medical conditions that increase the risk of severe COVID complications (these include cancer, diabetes, Down’s syndrome chronic heart, lung, kidney or liver disease, hypertension, smokers, stroke)

Boosters may be considered by

- Adults at high risk of occupational exposure to COVID (healthcare workers, teachers)
- Adults 18-49 who have chronic medical conditions that increase the risk of severe COVID complications (these include Cancer, diabetes, Down’s syndrome, chronic heart, lung, kidney or liver disease, hypertension, pregnancy, smokers, stroke)

Those who previously received the Moderna or J&J vaccines are not eligible for boosters at this time

3. *When is the under-12 group likely to start receiving vaccines? What about other child age categories (6 months to 4 years)?*

Data from studies on children and a recommendation on vaccination of children 5-11 is expected in October 2021.

Data and recommendations on children younger than 5 years will likely be available in early 2022

4. *Why is COVID-19 vaccines not like other vaccines which are administered only once in a lifetime?*

Almost all vaccines are administered several times in a lifetime. The frequency of vaccination varies based on how much immunity each dose of the vaccine produces, the immune status of the individual receiving the vaccine, the likelihood that the organism against which the vaccine is directed changes with time.

For example:

- Tetanus vaccine consists of a series of 3 vaccines given in childhood, with boosters at least every 10 years (due to immunity decreasing over time)
- Flu vaccine is given every year as the flu virus is constantly changing (mutating), so there are new strains of the virus in the vaccine each year
- Pneumococcal vaccine is given in childhood and then again at age 65

5. *What rate are people losing their immunity to COVID-19 after vaccination?*

This is a tough question to answer as we actually do not have a good way to easily measure immunity induced by vaccine.

Antibody levels as measured by a lab test do decline about 3 months after vaccination. But this does not mean decline in immunity as there are other parts of the immune system (cell mediated immunity) that remain active and protect against COVID.

Based on studies from UK and Israel, protection against infection decreases at about 6 months, at which point breakthrough infections become more common. But vaccines still protect against serious COVID illness namely hospitalization and death.

6. *Are there specific groups of people that cannot/should not receive vaccination?*

- The main reason why people cannot receive the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna) is an allergic reaction. If you have a history of allergy to previous injectable vaccines, discuss with your doctor whether you can receive the vaccine.
Allergy to foods, penicillin, other oral antibiotics are NOT reasons to avoid the COVID vaccines.
- There is a small risk of blood clots with the J&J vaccine. Those with prior history of blood clots, women who are taking oral contraceptives are at increased risk of these blood clots and should consider receiving an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) instead

7. *Do states have a mechanism for preventing people not eligible for vaccine to travel across state lines to get vaccinated?*

Every COVID vaccine needs to be entered in the State vaccine registry. However, the different state registries do not generally communicate with each other. So it possible to get additional doses of vaccine by going across state lines

Social/Community response

1. Is it safe to be socializing with other vaccinated people?

Depends on several things

Are you all masked while socializing indoors? That is low risk

Unmasked but meeting outdoors? Low risk

Unmasked, indoors, with friends who are careful about masking around others and in public places? Probably low risk

2. Is it okay to be singing with other vaccinated people?

Same as above. As you know singing is a particularly high-risk activity for transmission of COVID.

So, I'd be careful about this.

3. Is it okay to travel internationally and what to watch out for in countries with other variants/mutants?

If you need to travel to see family or for business, you can do so reasonably safely.

Regulations around travel related requirements are changing constantly, so check regulations and documentation for the US and the destination country before you go

Some additional tips:

- Test before travel, stay home from the date of test to the time of travel to minimize risk of acquiring infection before travel
- Find routes with fewest stopovers
- Wear a mask on plane, social distance as much as possible
- Retest at day 3-5 after trip and quarantine until test comes back negative

4. Where should small businesses look to for guidance regarding COVID-19 safety precautions and how to protect the workforce?

Minnesota Department of Health and the CDC have useful information. See below

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/businesses.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/workplaces-businesses/index.html>