

COVID-19 Vaccines Are Safe & Effective

The Science Is Clear: The Benefits of Vaccination Outweigh the Risks



Who is eligible to be vaccinated/boosted?

Everyone ages 6 months and older should receive a COVID-19 vaccine primary series. A primary series includes an additional dose for immunocompromised persons.

Everyone 5 years of age and older who completed their primary vaccine series OR got a previous booster dose at least 2 months prior should get an “updated” Pfizer or Moderna booster. The updated boosters were authorized by the FDA in August 2022 and may provide better protection against current variants. Those 5 years and older are no longer eligible for the “original” boosters.

Different age groups get different dosages depending on what dosage was studied in each clinical trial. Younger children get a smaller dosage than older children and youth.

The monovalent Novavax COVID-19 vaccine is authorized as a booster dose for ages 18+, but the **Pfizer and Moderna updated boosters are the recommended booster choices for all persons who are able to receive these vaccines.**

For more information about booster doses, please see the [COVID-19 Vaccine Schedule](#).

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe and effective?

Yes. The [Pfizer](#), [Moderna](#), and [Novavax](#) COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19.

The FDA granted full approval for the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for persons ages 12 and over. Pfizer has an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the FDA for use in children and youth ages 6 months to 11 years. The Moderna vaccine is approved for persons 18 and older and authorized for children and youth ages 6 months to 17 years. Novavax is authorized by the FDA for persons 12 and older.

The Johnson & Johnson (J&J) COVID-19 vaccine has an EUA for persons 18 and older. In most situations, Pfizer, Moderna, or Novavax vaccines are recommended over the J&J vaccine for primary and booster vaccination. This is due to the risk of serious adverse events, such as a rare type of blood clot.

What are possible side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines?

Some people have experienced side effects, like temporary pain, redness or swelling in the arm where they received the vaccine, fever, chills, tiredness, muscle pain nausea, and/or headache. Side effects in infants and younger children include irritability, crying, sleepiness, and loss of appetite. These side effects are normal for any vaccine and are expected as the body builds cells to defend against COVID-19.

How long should I wait to get my second dose of Pfizer, Moderna, or Novavax?

The recommended time between dose 1 and dose 2 is 3 weeks (21 days) for Pfizer and Novavax and 4 weeks (28 days) for Moderna for all persons who are:

- Moderately to severely immunocompromised, or
- Age 65 and older, or
- In need of rapid protection due to concerns about exposure to COVID-19 or risk of severe disease.

The CDC recently changed its recommendations to allow up to 8 weeks between doses of Pfizer, Moderna, or Novavax for other persons, such as males ages 12 to 39 years due to the small risk of myocarditis after receiving these vaccines. This longer interval between doses may also increase vaccine effectiveness. Talk with your healthcare provider if you have questions about when you should get your second dose. An overview of COVID-19 vaccination recommendations can be found on the [COVID-19 Vaccine Schedule](#).

Can I get a booster dose if my primary vaccine series is not authorized in the United States?

Persons 5 years and older who were fully vaccinated with a WHO-authorized vaccine (such as Astra Zeneca) or as part of a clinical trial can get a booster dose after finishing their primary series.

If I need a booster dose, does that mean that vaccines aren't working?

The [COVID-19 vaccines are working well](#) to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19. However, there is reduced protection over time, especially among populations such as older adults and those with underlying medical conditions, against mild and moderate disease. **Make sure to stay up-to-date by getting a booster dose when eligible!**

What are “updated” boosters?

The “original” boosters targeted the original COVID-19 variant. The “updated” boosters target the original variant AND the Omicron variants that have been causing the most recent cases. The FDA authorized the updated boosters to try to provide better protection against current variants. The Pfizer updated booster is available for those 5 years and older and the Moderna updated booster is available for those 6 years and older.

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Are COVID-19 vaccines safe for persons who are pregnant and/or breastfeeding?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccine can help protect against severe illness for persons who are pregnant and/or breastfeeding, trying to become pregnant, or might become pregnant in the future. Due to changes in the body from pregnancy, pregnant and recently pregnant persons are more likely to get severely ill with COVID-19 compared to non-pregnant persons.

For more information, please see [COVID-19 Vaccines While Pregnant or Breastfeeding \(CDC\)](#).

If children and youth have a lower risk of a severe COVID-19 infection, why should they get the vaccine?

The CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that all eligible children get vaccinated against COVID-19. Although children and youth are at a lower risk of becoming severely ill with COVID-19 compared with adults, they can:

- Get very sick from COVID-19, including requiring hospitalization. Children with [underlying medical conditions](#) are at higher risk for severe illness, but one-third of children and teens who are hospitalized have NO underlying medical conditions
- Develop serious complications like [multisystem inflammatory syndrome \(MIS-C\)](#)—a condition where different body parts become inflamed, including the heart, lungs, kidneys, brain, skin, eyes, or gastrointestinal organs.
- Develop [post-COVID conditions](#), also called “long COVID”.
- Spread COVID-19 to others, including vulnerable members of their family.
- Miss school, sports, extracurricular activities and other important events if they get infected.

I've had COVID-19. Do I still need a vaccine?

Yes. People can get infected with COVID-19 more than once. The CDC recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older get the vaccine, even if they've had COVID-19. We don't know how long someone is protected against getting infected again after recovering from the virus. Current antibody tests cannot tell us whether a person is protected from getting another COVID-19 infection. We also don't know whether the immunity developed against one strain will provide enough protection against new variants.

Serious adverse events after COVID-19 vaccination are rare.

The FDA has determined that the benefits of the vaccines far outweigh the risks. The risk of severe disease, hospitalization or death from COVID-19 in unvaccinated/unboosted persons is much greater than any risk of serious side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines themselves. For more information, see [FAQs About COVID-19 Vaccination \(CDC\)](#).

You should seek immediate medical attention if you have any of the symptoms described below after vaccination:

A rare but serious type of blood clot, [Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome \(TTS\)](#), has occurred in a small number of people who received the J&J vaccine. **Symptoms include** shortness of breath; chest pain; leg swelling; persistent abdominal pain, severe headaches or blurred vision; easy bruising or tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the site of the injection. An increased risk of TTS has not been seen with the Pfizer, Moderna or Novavax vaccines, so the CDC now recommends that the Pfizer, Moderna or Novavax vaccine is used in all eligible persons if possible, including booster doses.

Rare instances of [Guillain-Barré Syndrome \(GBS\)](#) have also occurred in a small number of persons who received the J&J vaccine. GBS is a rare nervous system disorder that can cause muscle weakness, or in the most severe cases, paralysis. Symptoms usually began 1-2 weeks after vaccination but can also appear later than that. **Symptoms include** weakness or tingling sensations, especially in the legs or arms, that can worsen and spread to other parts of the body.

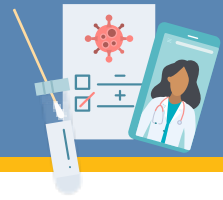
There have been cases of myocarditis (heart inflammation) and pericarditis (inflammation of the sac around the heart) among youth after getting an mRNA vaccine or Novavax. These have been mostly in male teens and young adults within a few days of getting the second dose of vaccine. **Symptoms include** chest pain, shortness of breath; or feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering or pounding heart. Most of the youth who received care responded well to medicine and rest and quickly felt better.

Myocarditis and pericarditis are even more rare after getting a booster dose. The CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics and others [still recommend](#) that anyone 6 months and older get vaccinated as the benefits far outweigh the risks.

For more information, see [Myocarditis and Pericarditis Following mRNA COVID-19 Vaccination \(CDC\)](#).

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Who needs an additional dose as part of their primary vaccine series?

To achieve the full benefits of vaccination, the CDC recommends that [moderately to severely immunocompromised](#) people receive an additional dose of an mRNA vaccine at least 28 days **after their second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna** vaccine or 28 days **after their first dose of J & J**. There is no recommendation for an additional dose with Novavax.

The recommendation includes children ages 6 months to 4 years who received a Moderna primary series and persons ages 5 and older who completed a Pfizer, Moderna or J&J primary series WHO HAVE:

- Been receiving active cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood
- Received an organ transplant and are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Received a stem cell transplant within the last 2 years or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
- Advanced or untreated HIV infection
- Active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids or other drugs that may suppress your immune response

People should talk to their healthcare provider about their medical condition, and whether getting an additional dose is appropriate for them.

How were the vaccines developed so quickly?

While the virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) was only detected in December 2019, scientists around the world have been working on vaccines for closely related viruses since 2007. For more information, see [Developing COVID-19 Vaccines](#).

Can I get a booster dose that is different from my first COVID-19 vaccine?

Some people may prefer to get a booster dose of the same vaccine type that they originally received. Other people may prefer to get a different booster dose from their original vaccine type.

Due to the risk of a rare (but serious) side effect of the J&J vaccine, the [CDC recommends](#) that individuals who received the J&J vaccine receive an mRNA (Pfizer or Moderna) booster dose.

Am I still considered “fully vaccinated” if I don’t get a booster dose?

Yes. Everyone at this time is still considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their second dose in a two-dose series, such as the Pfizer, Moderna or Novavax vaccines, or two weeks after a single dose vaccine, such as the J&J vaccine. However, becoming fully vaccinated **AND** boosted remains the best way to protect yourself from severe illness, hospitalization and death due to COVID-19, and to reduce the spread of the virus.

Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine or a booster?

There are many places to receive a free COVID-19 vaccine or a booster dose. None of the Alameda County Community Vaccination Clinics require I.D., insurance, or an appointment.

For a comprehensive list of vaccine sites near you, see [Alameda County Vaccine Availability](#) or visit: <https://linktr.ee/AlamedaCountyOHE>.

For assistance scheduling a free vaccine appointment, call: 510-268-2101.



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