

# COVID-19 Vaccines Are Safe & Effective

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



## Who is eligible to be vaccinated/boosted?

Anyone ages 5 and older is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine. The Pfizer vaccine is approved for anyone ages 16 and older and authorized for children and youth ages 5-15. Moderna and Johnson & Johnson/J&J vaccines are only authorized for persons ages 18 and older.

Everyone **should** get a booster dose IF:

- They are ages 12 and older and received their second dose of Pfizer at least 5 months ago or
- They are ages 18 and older and received their second dose of Moderna at least 5 months ago, or
- They are ages 5 and older, immunocompromised, and received their additional primary shot of Pfizer or Moderna at least 5 months ago, or
- They are ages 18 and older and received a first dose of Johnson & Johnson/ J&J vaccine at least 2 months ago. 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. The J&J vaccine is still authorized by the FDA for those who prefer it or who are not able to receive the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

## Will children and youth ages 5-11 receive the same dose as those ages 12 and older?

Children ages 5-11 will receive a lower dose vaccine (1/3 of the dose for teens and adults) with a smaller needle. The two doses should be given 21 days apart just like in teens and adults.

## Are COVID-19 vaccines effective?

The [Pfizer](#), [Moderna](#), and [J&J](#) COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19, but Pfizer and Moderna may offer better protection than J&J.

## Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Yes. All three available COVID-19 vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna, and J&J) are safe and 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 16 and over. Pfizer has an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for use in children and youth ages 5-15. The Johnson & Johnson (J&J) and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines also have EUAs from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for persons 18 and older.

## 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 \(CDC\)](#).

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

Persons 16 years and older who were fully vaccinated with a WHO-authorized vaccine (such as Astra Zeneca) or as part of a clinical trial (such as Novavax) can get a Pfizer booster dose at least 6 months 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, public health experts are starting to see reduced protection over time against mild and moderate disease, especially among populations such as older adults and those with underlying medical conditions.

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

Some people have experienced side effects, like temporary pain or swelling in the arm where they received the vaccine, fever, chills, tiredness, and/or headache. These side effects are normal for any vaccine and are expected as the body builds cells to defend against COVID-19.

# COVID-19 Vaccines Are Safe & Effective

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



## 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 complications](#), 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 5 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 outweigh the risks of not being vaccinated. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Heart Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics also recommend that anyone ages 12 and over get vaccinated. For more information, see [Things to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines \(CDC\)](#).

## 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 or Moderna vaccines, so the CDC now recommends that the Pfizer or Moderna 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 can include weakness or tingling sensations, especially in the legs or arms, that can worsen and spread to other parts of the body.

In the over 150 million people who had been fully vaccinated with an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) as of late July, the CDC confirmed about 700 cases of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the sac around the heart).

These cases were mostly in male teens and young adults, ages 16 and over, 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 persons who received care responded well to treatment and rest, and quickly felt better.

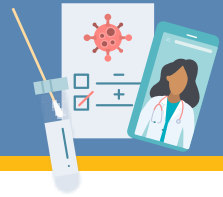
For more information, see [Myocarditis and Pericarditis Following mRNA COVID-19 Vaccination \(CDC\)](#).

## Who needs an additional (third) dose of COVID-19 vaccine (not a booster)?

To achieve the full benefits of vaccination, the CDC recommends that [moderately to severely immunocompromised](#) people receive a third dose of an mRNA vaccine at least 28 days after their second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. *(continued on the next page)*

# COVID-19 Vaccines are Safe & Effective

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



This includes anyone ages 5 and older who has:

- 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

A moderately to severely immunocompromised person who received the J&J vaccine should get a booster dose of Pfizer or Moderna at least two months after their initial vaccination. 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 2006. For more information, see [Coronavirus Vaccine Development](#)

## Are the booster doses different than the initial doses?

The Moderna booster is half the dose of the original vaccine series. The Pfizer and J&J boosters are the same dose as the first dose(s).

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

Youth ages 12 to 17 can only receive a Pfizer booster. Anyone 18 years and older may choose which booster to receive, sometimes called “mixing and matching”.

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 or Moderna 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 hospitalization and death due to COVID-19, and to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and help prevent new variants from emerging.

## 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: 510-208-4VAX (510-208-4829).



**ALAMEDA COUNTY HEALTH CARE SERVICES AGENCY  
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

Colleen Chawla – Agency Director  
Kimi Watkins-Tartt – Director  
Nicholas Moss, MD – Health Officer

### Contact

Public Health Department:  
(510) 267-8000 Main Line

COVID-19 Information:  
(510) 268-2101

[www.acphd.org](http://www.acphd.org)