

# COVID-19 vaccine frequently asked questions

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## General information

### When can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Mass General Brigham is following federal and state guidance from public health officials for vaccine distribution. The first wave of people who are getting the vaccine are frontline health care workers and first responders. Patients in long-term care facilities and nursing homes are also getting the vaccine.

Currently, Massachusetts [public health officials](#) think the general public will be able to get the vaccine sometime between April and June 2021. Access will be coordinated through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. If you are high risk, are 65 and older, or work in certain jobs like education, transit, or public works, you might be able to receive the vaccine sooner, between February and April. If you live in another state, please check your state's information.

We are coordinating with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and expect that we will have more information in the coming weeks on when and how patients can get the vaccine. We will continue to update our [MassGeneralBrigham.org](https://www.massgeneralbrigham.org/covid19/vaccine) website as more information becomes available and encourage you to check here for updates: <https://www.massgeneralbrigham.org/covid19/vaccine>

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has more information on their web site about who is [high risk for severe illness](#) and about when the vaccine may be [available to the general public](#).

### Can children get the vaccine?

Currently the vaccine the Pfizer vaccine is approved for children ages 16 and older. The Moderna vaccine is not approved for children. It is approved for adults aged 18 and older.

### How do we know the vaccine works?

The COVID-19 vaccine has proven to be extremely effective. According to Phase 3 trials, the [Pfizer vaccine](#) is 95% effective 7 days after the second dose. The [Moderna vaccine](#) is 94% effective 14 days after the second dose. These results were consistent across gender, age, race and ethnicity.

### How long will immunity last after I get vaccinated? Will I need to be vaccinated every year?

We do not know this yet. The clinical trials will continue to monitor participants to see how long protection lasts. We will provide updated information as it becomes available.

Because we don't yet know how long immunity will last, it's still important to [wash your hands, wear a mask, and socially distance](#).

### Can we stop wearing masks and social distancing after getting vaccinated?

No, not yet. We know that the vaccine protects you from getting sick, but we do not know if it stops you from giving it to other people. Since not everyone will get the vaccine right away, we must be careful to protect others. Even if you get the vaccine, you should still wear a mask, practice social distancing, and

wash your hands. Infection control experts will let us know when it is safe to modify or stop these safety measures.

### **Why do we need to get the vaccine if we're wearing masks and social distancing?**

We need to use all the tools available to us to stop the pandemic. Together, the COVID-19 vaccine and simple everyday actions like wearing a mask and social distancing will offer the best protection from COVID-19. And even though the vaccines are 90% to 95% effective, you still don't know how effective it will be for you. About 5% to 10% of people immunized may still get the virus. You should do everything you can to reduce your risk of getting the virus and passing it to others.

### **Can people get COVID-19 from a vaccine?**

No. The vaccine does not contain the whole or live virus and therefore cannot cause COVID-19.

### **I already had COVID-19. Should I get vaccinated?**

Yes, when it becomes available to you, you can still get the vaccine if you have had COVID-19 and have recovered. If you are actively sick with COVID-19 or have [symptoms that could be from COVID-19](#), you should not get the vaccine.

### **What are the side effects of the vaccine?**

Some people do get side effects after receiving the vaccine. For both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, most mild side effects resolve within a day or so.

- The most commonly reported symptoms from the Pfizer vaccine have been pain at the site of vaccination, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, and chills.
- The most commonly reported symptoms from the Moderna vaccine have been pain at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, swollen lymph nodes in the same arm as the injection, nausea and vomiting, and fever.

### **Where can I find more information?**

- Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html>
- When vaccine is limited, who gets vaccinated first? - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations.html>
- COVID-19 Vaccine in Massachusetts - <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine-in-massachusetts>
- People at higher risk for severe illness - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#People-at-Higher-Risk-for-Severe-Illness>
- Food and Drug administration Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine - <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine>
- Food and Drug administration Moderna COVID-19 vaccine - <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/moderna-covid-19-vaccine>
- Mass General Brigham COVID-19 website - <https://www.massgeneralbrigham.org/covid19>

## **Allergies**

### **Should I be concerned about allergic reactions to the COVID-19 Vaccine?**

There have been some reports of people having allergic reactions after getting the vaccine. A small number of people had a severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Based on this, the US Food and Drug Administration and the CDC recommends that people with a history of anaphylaxis to any of the



ingredients in the COVID19 vaccine should **not** get the vaccine. People with other food or medication allergies can receive the vaccine.

In general, most patients allergic to one vaccine can receive other vaccinations safely. If you have a history of severe allergic reactions to vaccines, injectable therapies, or any component of the COVID-19 vaccine you are going to receive, you should talk to your primary care provider or allergist (if you have one). Your provider can help you decide if it is safe to get vaccinated.

### What are the ingredients in the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 Vaccines?

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines do not contain gelatin, egg, or latex. Also, the vial stoppers are not made with natural rubber latex. Patients who have latex allergies can receive the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines contain **polyethylene glycol**. Reactions to Polyethylene glycol are very rare. Patients with a history of having an allergic reaction to polyethylene glycol should talk to their provider before receiving either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

### Ingredients of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 Vaccines

	<b>Pfizer-BioNTech</b>	<b>Moderna</b>
<b>Active</b>	Nucleoside-modified messenger RNA (modRNA) encoding the viral spike (S) glycoprotein of SARS-CoV-2.	Nucleoside-modified mRNA encoding the viral spike (S) glycoprotein of SARS-CoV-2
<b>Inactive - lipids</b>	(4-hydroxybutyl)azanediylbis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis(2-hexyldecanoate)	SM-102 (Proprietary to Moderna)
	2[(polyethylene glycol [PEG])-2000]-N,N-ditetradecylacetamide	Polyethylene glycol (PEG) 2000 dimyristoyl glycerol (DMG)
	1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine	1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine
	Cholesterol	Cholesterol
<b>Inactive – salts, sugars, buffers</b>	Potassium chloride, monobasic potassium phosphate, sodium chloride, dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate	Tromethamine, tromethamine hydrochloride, acetic acid, sodium acetate
	Sugar (sucrose)	Sugar (sucrose)
	The diluent, added to the vaccine for administration, is saline (Sodium Chloride)	No diluent needed



## Immunocompromised patients

### **I am immunocompromised. Should I get the COVID-19 Vaccine?**

The CDC has stated that people who are immunocompromised may receive the COVID-19 vaccines, as long as they have had no issues with getting vaccines in the past. For questions about allergies and the vaccines, please see the allergy frequently asked questions.

Please note, the COVID19 vaccines are **not** live vaccines; live vaccines are often not recommended for immunocompromised patients.

Patients who are immunocompromised include:

- Living with HIV
- On immunosuppressive therapies like steroids (prednisone) for a long time
- On immunosuppressive therapies for prevention of organ transplant rejection
- On immune altering medications like biologic therapies (often injectable). These are used for treatment of autoimmune diseases such as Crohn's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and others.

It is not known how effective the COVID-19 vaccines will be for you. You may have less of an immune response to the vaccine. Even if you get the vaccine, you should still wear a mask, practice social distancing, and wash your hands. This is true for everyone getting vaccine now. Infection control experts will let us know when it is safe to modify or stop these safety measures. For now, we do not know if you may need long-term boosters or revaccination. We may not be doing repeat vaccination until everyone is vaccinated.

### **Should my immunosuppression medications be altered when I get the vaccine?**

In general, we are not recommending altering the immunosuppression before or after vaccination. In specific cases, your provider may recommend changes. If you have questions, consider discussing this during your next medical visit.

### **Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I have had an organ transplant?**

You can get the vaccine. It's possible that the vaccine may be less effective in providing protection for you. It may be best to wait to get vaccinated at least 3 months after your transplant if possible, in order to improve the immune response to the vaccine (when your immune suppression may be less). There is no preference for the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines. Your transplant provider will tell you if you need transplant labs after vaccination.

### **I am waiting for organ transplantation. Should I get the vaccine?**

In general, vaccines work better before organ transplant, before the immunosuppression is started. If possible we would recommend that you get the vaccine before transplant. We do not currently have mechanisms now to expedite that.

## Pregnancy and breastfeeding

### **I am pregnant. Should I get the COVID-19 Vaccine?**

Vaccination, especially with vaccines that do not contain live virus, are considered a safe and routine part of prenatal care. For example, the flu shot is not only offered during pregnancy but recommended.



In line with recommendations from the CDC, when the COVID-19 vaccine is available for patients, it will be offered to those who are pregnant. However, you should speak with your OB/GYN about whether or not you should get vaccinated. Both the virus and the vaccine are new. There is very little data on the safety of this vaccine in pregnancy as pregnant people were not included in the trials of the vaccines. However, 18 individuals who received the vaccine in the studies did become pregnant after vaccination. So far those pregnancies are ongoing. We hope to learn more about those individuals soon. Like many new medications and vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccine was studied in pregnant animals and these studies did not show any complications related to the vaccine.

With the help of your OB/GYN, you can discuss what is the best option for you. This will be based on your risk for exposure to the virus and how sick you might get if you do get the virus.

**If I decide to get the vaccine during pregnancy does it matter when I get vaccinated?**

The decision about when you get vaccinated should be made together with your OB/GYN. This should consider your risk of exposure to the virus and what your chance of getting very sick might be if you do get the virus. There is no data to suggest that the COVID-19 vaccines cause miscarriage.

**I heard that some people had reactions after vaccination. Are these dangerous in pregnancy?**

Symptoms including fever, muscle aches, joint pains, fatigue, and headache are common side effects of the vaccine (particularly after the second dose). Most mild side effects resolve within a day or two and are not believed to be dangerous. If you are worried about side effects from the vaccine and your pregnancy, talk to your OB/GYN before getting the vaccine.

**I am breastfeeding. Should I get the vaccine?**

When the vaccine is available for patients, it will be offered to breastfeeding individuals. At this time, there is no data regarding the safety of this new vaccine on breastfed infants of mothers who were vaccinated. However, any vaccine that makes it into the breast milk is likely to be quickly inactivated when the milk is digested. In addition, some of your COVID-19 immunity can pass to the baby through the breastmilk after you receive the vaccine.

**Will the vaccine affect my chance of getting pregnant in the future?**

There is no evidence that vaccines affect future fertility.

**What if I become pregnant between the first dose of the vaccine and the second shot?**

You can choose to either get the second dose during pregnancy or wait to get the second dose until after you have had your baby. Many individuals who have already had the first dose may choose to get the second dose so they will become immune during pregnancy

**I am planning pregnancy in the near future. Should I get vaccinated now or wait?**

The COVID-19 vaccines are not believed to affect your future fertility. Getting vaccinated before you get pregnant may prevent COVID-19 during pregnancy. It can also avoid the need for vaccination during pregnancy. However, whether or not you wait to get vaccinated may depend on when the vaccine is available to you.

