A Union of Professionals

COVID-19 Vaccine Information for Workers

Adapted from the National Clearinghouse for Worker Safety and Health Training, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Worker Training Program

Protect Yourself and Others

COVID-19 infection threatens everyone's health and well-being. COVID-19, the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, was the leading cause of death in the United States in 2020. To defeat this virus, we need to use several approaches.

Vaccines are an important part of effective control against spread in your workplace and community. Quarantine or isolation, physical distancing, hand-washing, mask wearing, and use of other safety measures at your work site must continue, even after you have been vaccinated. These measures are important to protect yourself and others.
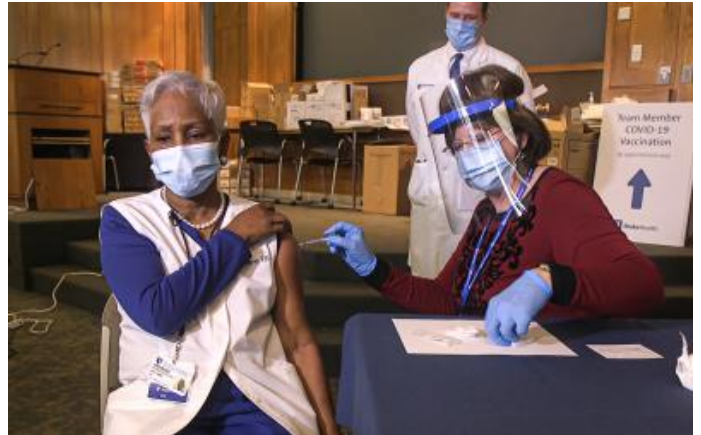

Photo courtesy of Blyth Morrell, Duke University Hospital

Top 5 Reasons to Get Vaccinated

1. To curb the spread of the virus and help stop the pandemic;
2. To prevent your family, friends and co-workers from getting sick;
3. To develop personal immunity and establish herd immunity;
4. To help make sure there are enough medical therapies and hospital beds for those who need them; and
5. To avoid shutdowns and social isolation.

COVID-19 Vaccines
According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, vaccinating 70 to 90 percent of the population can halt the spread of COVID-19 by establishing immunity within our communities. This is sometimes called herd immunity. Widespread education about and participation in the vaccination program is needed for it to be fully effective. It is estimated that it will be mid- to late- 2021 before we reach the desired level of vaccination for herd immunity.

Are the vaccines effective?

Healthcare professionals and vaccine researchers are confident that the vaccine will provide protection from serious COVID-19 disease.
Important facts about the vaccine:

- The vaccines *do not* contain live virus and *cannot* give you COVID-19.
- The available vaccines are between 92 and 95 percent effective in preventing COVID-19 after getting both shots in the series.
- The vaccines require that the two shots be given many days apart.
- Both shots are necessary for full protection. However, experts do not currently know how long it will protect you from getting the disease after vaccination.
- The vaccine works across age groups, genders, races and ethnicities.

How do I weigh the risks and benefits?

Some people may experience mild discomfort after getting the vaccine, but this only lasts a few days. To date, no one has gotten sick or died from getting the vaccine. However, millions of people have gotten sick from the virus, and hundreds of thousands have died.

Comparison between vaccine side effects and COVID-19 health effects	
Potential vaccine side effects	**Potential COVID-19 health effects**
Soreness at the site of injection	Death
Headache, fatigue, aches, chills, joint pain, nausea	Headache, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, joint pain, nausea
Fever	Fever, heart palpitations
Allergic reaction (rare)	Brain fog
	Depression, anxiety, PTSD
	Inflammation of the heart muscle
	Difficulty breathing
	Acute kidney injury
	Rash, hair loss
	Loss of smell and taste, sleep issues, difficulty with concentration, memory loss

What if I have already had COVID-19?

Workers who have already had COVID-19 can still be vaccinated. Individuals do not need to be tested for the SARS-CoV-2 virus before getting the vaccine. People who are currently infected should wait approximately 90 days after they were diagnosed or after they first showed symptoms before getting vaccinated.

How do I decide if the vaccine is right for me?

The decision to get vaccinated can be a difficult personal choice. You may hear incorrect information about how safe the vaccine is and how well it works.

You should talk to a trustworthy source such as your primary doctor to make a decision about receiving the vaccine. You can also research websites from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or your state or local health department.

What if my employer does not offer the vaccine?

If your employer does not offer the vaccine, check with your local or state health department to identify your eligibility and locations near you that are providing it.

Who should not get the vaccine?

The vaccine should not be given to people with certain underlying medical conditions or to those who have vulnerable or weak immune systems. This includes people with autoimmune diseases like Guillain-Barre syndrome. It also includes those who have bleeding disorders or those who have current or active COVID-19 disease.

Can pregnant or breastfeeding women be vaccinated?

There are limited data on the safety of the vaccines on people who are pregnant. Pregnant women were intentionally excluded from the vaccine trials. A small number of women did become pregnant during the trials and are being monitored. Studies with people who are pregnant are planned. Based on how mRNA vaccines work, experts believe the vaccines are unlikely to be dangerous to the mother or the fetus, but actual risks are not yet known.

Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the CDC do recommend that the vaccines *be offered* to healthcare personnel and other essential workers due to their risk of exposure and because people who are pregnant are at higher risk of severe illness and death if infected with COVID-19 and elevated risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Healthcare workers who are pregnant should consult with their healthcare provider to weigh the benefits and risks for each choice. Pregnant women who do receive the vaccine should take acetaminophen if they get a fever. Women who are trying to conceive can safely take the vaccine. There are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in lactating women or on the effects of mRNA vaccines on the breastfed infant or on milk production/excretion. mRNA vaccines are not thought to be a risk to the breastfeeding infant. For more information see https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/pregnancy.html.

What about reports of severe allergic reactions to COVID-19 vaccines?

If you have had a severe allergic reaction to other vaccines or injectable therapies, it is possible that you will be allergic to an ingredient in the COVID-19 vaccine. It is very important to discuss your medical history and what is in the vaccine with your doctor prior to getting it. Ultimately, your doctor can help you decide if it is safe for you to get vaccinated.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Vaccination: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html

CDC COVID-19 Vaccines and Allergic Reactions: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/allergic-reaction.html

Food and Drug Administration COVID-19 Vaccines: https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Worker Training Program COVID-19: https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/covid19worker/index.cfm

National Institutes of Health Community Engagement Alliance, How Are Vaccines Tested? https://www.nlm.nih.gov/oet/ed/ceal/how-are-vaccines-tested.html

Getting 'Back to Normal' Is Going to Take **All of Our Tools**

If we use all the tools we have, we stand the best chance of getting our families, communities, schools, and workplaces "back to normal" sooner:

Get vaccinated.

Wear a mask.

Stay 6 feet from others, and avoid crowds.

Wash hands often.

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/vaccines

NIH Community Engagement Alliance, Learning About Vaccines: https://covid19community.nih.gov/resources/learning-about-vaccines

NIH COVID-19 Vaccine Development, Behind the Scenes: https://covid19.nih.gov/research-highlights/vaccine-development

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs COVID-10 Vaccines at VA: https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/

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