



# Understanding the COVID-19 Vaccine

As a healthcare worker, you are among the first to be offered the COVID-19 vaccine. This is because your work may put you at increased risk for infection with the virus that causes COVID-19. The following information is to help you better understand the vaccine, protect yourself, and prevent the spread of this virus to your loved ones and patients.

## Development and Testing

The federal government, together with vaccine manufacturers, has been working since the start of the pandemic to make a COVID-19 vaccine available as soon as possible. COVID-19 vaccines are being tested in large clinical trials to make sure they meet safety standards. Many people were recruited to participate in these trials to see how the vaccines offer protection to people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as those with different medical conditions. It is important to know that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) carefully reviews all safety data from clinical trials and authorizes emergency vaccine use only when the expected benefits outweigh potential risks. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) reviews all safety data before recommending any COVID-19 vaccine for use to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The FDA and CDC will continue to monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines after they begin to be administered to the public to make sure even very rare side effects are identified and evaluated.

## The mRNA Vaccine Technology

The first two COVID-19 vaccines expected to be granted emergency use in the United States are produced by two companies, Pfizer and Moderna, using a technology called messenger RNA (mRNA). This is the first time mRNA technology has been used in a vaccine to create immunity to a virus. The vaccine does not contain the COVID-19 virus. Instead it uses mRNA, which is a small piece of genetic code, that teaches your body's cells how to manufacture a protein found in the virus so that your body can identify it and launch an immune response. The mRNA does not come in contact with your DNA, nor does it change your DNA in any way.

## Efficacy

In clinical trials, both mRNA vaccines performed at a very high rate of efficacy with final reports from Phase 3 clinical trials demonstrating the vaccines reached ~95% efficacy in clinical trials of tens of thousands of people. In order to achieve maximum protection from the vaccine, two doses are required. If you get the Pfizer vaccine you will need a second dose 21 days after the first dose. If you get the Moderna vaccine you will need a second dose 28 days after the first dose. You must get both doses of the same vaccine from the same manufacturer to be fully vaccinated.

## Side Effects

The most common side effect that may happen are mild to moderate injection site reactions such as soreness and swelling. The response some people have after getting the vaccine can be similar to symptoms of mild COVID-19 infection such as generalized muscle pain, chills, and headache. This does not mean that the vaccine gave you a COVID-19 infection. The vaccine does not contain any live virus so it is impossible to develop a COVID-19 infection from it. While people may have mild to moderate responses, some people may have more unpleasant side effects including

fever, more severe head and body aches, and fatigue. Side effects may be more intense following the second dose, but usually are gone within a day.

### **Personal Protective Equipment**

Even after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, healthcare workers will still need to wear appropriate personal protective equipment for many months while the general public is vaccinated. Even when out in the community, the CDC recommends that you continue to follow social distancing and mask wearing recommendations until public health officials indicate otherwise. Experts need to understand more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide before deciding to change recommendations on steps everyone should take to slow the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

### **For More Information**

To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine, visit:

- CDC at [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html)
- NJ Department of Health at [www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/covid2019\\_vaccination.shtml](http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/covid2019_vaccination.shtml)
- FDA [www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines](http://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines)

Or call:

COVID-19 Hotline at 1-800-962-1253 or 2-1-1

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