

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE

To better protect nursing facility staff and residents, many of you will be the first in the nation to be eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. We want to make sure you have all the information you need to make the best decision regarding receiving the vaccine for you and your loved ones. Dr. Larissa Lucas has answered some of the most frequently asked questions about the COVID-19 vaccine.



ABOUT LARISSA LUCAS, MD, FACP, CMD, HMDC

Dr. Larissa Lucas is an internist and Certified Medical Director at North Shore Physicians Group. In her role, Dr. Lucas cares for long term care residents and post-acute patients residing in skilled nursing facilities. In April 2020, Dr. Lucas participated as the Medical Director to support the opening of Boston Hope at the Boston Convention Center.

IS THE COVID-19 VACCINE SAFE?

The U.S. 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. COVID-19 vaccines were tested in large clinical trials to make sure they met stringent safety standards. More than 70,000 people have participated in these trials to see how the vaccines offer protection to people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as those with different underlying medical conditions.

CAN I GET COVID-19 FROM THE VACCINE?

No. The COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna are Messenger RNA vaccines—also called mRNA vaccines. mRNA vaccines do not use the live virus that causes COVID-19. mRNA vaccines dissolve quickly after administration and will not cause alterations of your DNA. While you might feel minor, temporary side effects from the injection, it is impossible to contract the virus from the vaccine.

HOW MANY DOSES ARE NEEDED AND WHY?

The COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna require two shots. The first shot starts building protection, but everyone needs to receive the second shot at least 21 days later to ensure they get the most protection the vaccine can offer. This is similar to other vaccines like Hepatitis B which require two doses.

SHOULD WOMEN WHO ARE OR PLANNING TO BECOME PREGNANT RECEIVE THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

According to the CDC, while studies have not yet been done, based on how mRNA vaccines work, experts believe the COVID-19 vaccines are unlikely to pose a risk for people who are pregnant. There is no evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 vaccine interferes with fertility. Pregnant women or women planning to be pregnant in the coming months should consult with a healthcare provider to help them make an informed decision.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) notes pregnant individuals are more likely to have certain manifestations of severe illness associated with COVID-19 infection such as ICU admission, mechanical ventilation, and death. Further, upwards of half of pregnant individuals also fall into another high-priority category, including frontline workers and those with underlying conditions. ACOG continues to urge that for pregnant individuals, the decision to vaccinate must be left to each patient in consult with their trusted clinician.

WILL THE VACCINE CAUSE SIDE EFFECTS? IF SO, HOW LONG MIGHT THEY LAST?

Some people who get a COVID-19 vaccine will experience side effects, particularly after the second dose. The side effects of the vaccine appear to be minor and temporary. Participants have reported pain at the injection site, fatigue, and occasional low-grade fever, headache, or aching muscles and joints. These side effects fade within 1-2 days. These side effects are actually common with all vaccines: they are a sign that a vaccine is working and triggering an immune response.

ARE THERE ANY LONG-TERM SIDE EFFECTS?

COVID-19 vaccines are still being tested for long-term side effects. At this point, no long-term safety issues have been detected. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are monitoring closely and as more people get vaccinated, additional information will be available in the coming weeks and months. CDC scientists and medical professionals will be continuously reviewing vaccine safety. They will keep providing information to the public and will take action on new safety concerns if needed.

We are still learning about COVID-19 vaccines, here is what we do know for sure: getting sick with COVID-19 is dangerous. We know that COVID-19 can cause long-term health problems, even in mild cases. It is unlikely that we will find any vaccine-related side effects that are riskier than having COVID-19.

CAN I STILL SPREAD THE VIRUS EVEN AFTER GETTING VACCINATED?

We do not yet know whether vaccinated individuals can spread the virus to others who may not have received the vaccine. That is why it will be critical that everyone continues to adhere to all the necessary public health protocols, including wearing masks, using proper hand hygiene, and social distancing. There is optimistic data from the clinical trials that vaccination will stop the spread of COVID-19.

I HAVE A PRE-EXISTING CONDITION. WILL TAKING THE VACCINE HAVE HARMFUL EFFECTS?

The vaccine is very safe for people with most health conditions. It is clear, that those with health conditions are at a higher risk for complications of COVID-19 infection. If you have a pre-existing condition, you should consult your doctor on what is best for you.

I ALREADY HAD COVID-19, DO I STILL NEED A VACCINE?

Yes, the vaccine is recommended for individuals who have recovered from COVID-19. In the clinical trial, 10% of the participants already had COVID-19 and receiving the vaccine appeared beneficial. People who have recovered from the infection may not have long lasting immunity and could become reinfected.

HOW LONG AFTER DOES AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS RECOVERED FROM COVID-19 NEED TO WAIT TO GET THE VACCINE?

They can get the vaccine right away after their recovery. Recovery is defined as 10 days after the diagnosis for mild to moderate infections and 20 days after the diagnosis for severe infections.

IS THE COVID-19 VACCINE FREE?

You will not have to pay for the vaccine. The vaccine itself is free, and your health insurance company will cover the administration costs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccine, here are several trusted resources. Scan the QR code using your cell phone's camera to take you directly to the website.



COVID-19 Vaccination from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html>



Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>



COVID-19 Vaccine in Massachusetts from Mass.Gov
<https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine-in-massachusetts>