MASSACHUSETTS SENIOR CARE ASSOCIATION

ARMING OURSELVES AGAINST COVID-19

Protect Yourself, Your Family, and Your Residents

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE

To better protect nursing facility staff and residents, 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.

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

Vaccination is an important part of routine prenatal care. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and CDC recommend pregnant and lactating women be offered the COVID vaccine. A pregnancy test is not required prior to vaccination. ACOG notes that pregnant women may be at increased risk of severe illness due to COVID-19 infection and urges pregnant individuals to discuss vaccination with their trusted clinician.

There is no evidence the COVID-19 vaccine interferes with fertility or pregnancy. 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. If you are planning to become pregnant, getting vaccinated before pregnancy may help prevent COVID-19 infection during pregnancy.

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. In the United States there are three vaccines approved. The Pfizer vaccine is now approved for people over age 12. Moderna and Janssen Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccinations are approved for over age 18.

CAN I GET COVID-19 FROM THE VACCINE?

No. You cannot get COVID-19 from a vaccine. None of the approved vaccines contain live or whole virus.

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. The Janssen Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine requires only one shot.

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 that are minor and temporary. Pain at the injection site, fatigue, and low-grade fever, headache, or aching muscles and joints are the most common and usually resolve within 24 hours. Side effects are a sign that a vaccine is working and triggering an immune response.

The Janssen Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccinations have a very small risk of [thrombocytopenia](#) (low platelets) and blood clots, primarily in women younger than 50 years old. After serious review of the data, the FDA and CDC have confidence that this vaccine is safe and effective in preventing COVID-19.

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.

CAN I STILL SPREAD THE VIRUS EVEN AFTER GETTING VACCINATED?
Vaccines have been very effective in bringing down the community spread of COVID-19. Infection after vaccination is rare but do occur in people with weakened immune systems. Those who become infected after vaccination have had mild illness and are unlikely to spread the virus. 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. At this time, the lifting of COVID-19 mask restrictions in Massachusetts does not apply to health care facilities.

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. Vaccine is safe after the recovery period. 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. Insurance is not required. If you do not have insurance, you can still get the vaccine.

WHEN AM I FULLY VACCINATED?
You are considered fully vaccinated if it has been greater than 2 weeks since getting the single-dose Janssen Johnson & Johnson vaccine or the second shot of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines.

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