COVID Vaccine FAQ's

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Which vaccines are currently approved?

Pfizer's vaccine was approved for emergency use by the FDA on Friday, December 11. Over 43,000 participants took part in their trial, which resulted in 95% efficacy for preventing the virus and serious illness. There were no serious illnesses or deaths in trial participants who received the vaccine.

Moderna's vaccine was approved for emergency use by the FDA on December 18. Over 30,000 participants took part in their vaccine trial, which shows the vaccine is 94.5% effective in preventing the virus or serious illness. There were no serious illnesses or deaths in trial participants who received the vaccine.

How do the vaccines work?

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use a newer vaccine technology called messenger RNA (mRNA), which delivers genetic information to our body that acts as instruction to our cells to create COVID-19 protein, which in turn elicits an immune response. **These vaccines do not use the live virus that causes COVID-19.**

This newer technology has been around for about 20 years and is easier to make than traditional vaccines, but has not been used in widespread human vaccines before now.

The vaccines were developed so quickly, how do I know it is safe?

Actually the science of this virus has been years in the making. The mRNA vaccine approach was invented in the 1990's. One distinct advantage of the mRNA vaccine approach is that it allows for speed of design and production. The COVID-19 vaccine was also "fast tracked" in that it has been able to jump ahead of other medications in years-long waiting line for approval. The urgency of making this vaccine has also meant that there have been investments made that have allowed processes that usually happen in sequence, to happen simultaneously. And finally, the fact that COVID is so widespread has meant that many more people have been able to be involved in the trials in a short time. As many as 43,548 people were in the trial for the Pfizer vaccine alone. This has enabled us to see very quickly if the vaccine works.

What should I expect the vaccination process to be like?

We understand that many people are afraid of needles – we don't much like them either. Fortunately, the diameter of the COVID vaccine needle is smaller than what you would normally see from a flu vaccination, so initial reports are that it may be less painful.

In order to ensure that people getting vaccinated do not have an adverse reaction, you will need to remain at the vaccination site for 30 minutes after you've received each shot.

Lastly, you should receive documentation of the vaccination. You'll need to have the documentation from the first shot with you when you get the second shot.

Can I still transmit the virus to others once I get the vaccine?

This is unknown at this time, which is why you'll still need to follow all protocols after getting the vaccine.

Where are the vaccines made?

The Pfizer vaccine for the United States is being manufactured in Missouri, Michigan, and Massachusetts. For more details on their manufacturing, click here.

The Moderna vaccine is being manufactured in Massachusetts.

Who will receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

Initial supplies of the vaccines will be limited so not everyone will be able to be vaccinated right away. Priority is given to people at highest risk for infection including healthcare workers and those in long term care facilities.

How is the COVID-19 vaccination given?

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (such as the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines) are given in two doses, injected into the muscles of the upper arm, similar to a flu shot (intramuscularly).

How many shots will I need?

For both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, two shots are required.

- The Pfizer vaccine requires two shots, 21 days apart.
- The Moderna vaccine requires two shots, 28 days apart.

The first shot starts to build immunity, but it is not enough for protection. The second shot is needed to receive the most protection from the vaccine.

It is not known at this time whether a booster shot will be required at some point in the future (similar to some other vaccines). The flu vaccine is an annual shot due to the many different strains of that virus.

Does the second dose have to be the same vaccine as the first dose?

Yes, the COVID-19 vaccines are not interchangeable. The second dose must be from the same manufacturer as the first dose.

I understand the Pfizer vaccine is super frozen. Won't that hurt my arm when I am vaccinated?

Yes, the Pfizer vaccine is super frozen (-70C), but it is thawed to room temperature before you receive the vaccination.

Will either vaccine cause symptoms?

Either vaccine may result in symptoms that are part of our body's **normal** immune response.

- Symptoms typically include: sore arm, muscle aches, headache, and/or fever/chills
- Symptoms could last several days requiring you to be out of work
- Symptoms are generally stronger following the second dose and were generally more frequent and severe in persons aged 18–55 years than in those aged >55 years.

In general, side effects have not been serious, much like other vaccines you may have received in the past. Any symptoms tend to peak on the second day and resolve by the fourth day.

What if I have an adverse event?

If you believe you are having a serious reaction, you should immediately contact your health care provider and seek medical attention. Adverse events following vaccination should be reported through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) (1-800-822-7967) or through their website.

The CDC is implementing a new smartphone-based tool called v-safe to check-in with people about side effects after they receive a COVID-19 vaccine. When you receive your vaccine, you should also receive a v-safe information sheet telling you how to enroll in v-safe. If you enroll, you will receive regular text messages directing you to surveys where you can report any problems or adverse reactions you have after receiving the vaccine.

What is V-Safe?

V-safe is a new CDC smart-phone based monitoring program for COVID-19 vaccine safety. Everyone who receives the COVID-19 vaccine will be encouraged to enroll in this online program. The system conducts daily health checks after vaccination for the first week, and then weekly for 6 weeks, followed by quarterly check-ins. The system collects data on side effects as well as any major health impacts.

How will the vaccines be distributed?

- Once a vaccine is approved for emergency use, the FDA will provide an authorization letter and fact sheet to the State
- Vermont expects to receive a weekly shipment of its allocation (based on population) of any approved vaccines
- The first allotment of any vaccine will be distributed to health care personnel as well as staff and residents of long term care facilities in the following order:
    - Emergency room staff, ICU staff, and COVID unit staff
    - EMTs
    - Long term care residents and staff (starting with skilled nursing facilities)
- As Vermont receives more vaccine, all health care personnel who have contact with patients will be offered the vaccine as part of this first distribution phase 1A (the State is hoping within the next few weeks)

I've already had COVID, should I still get the vaccine?

Those who have had the COVID-19 virus within the past 90 days are encouraged to delay vaccination so others can get it - since those who have had the coronavirus are less likely to get it again within 90 days.

When will I be able to get the vaccine?

The timing is unknown, but priority is being given to health care workers and those at higher risk due to health conditions.

Should I call my doctor to get on a list for the vaccine?

No, for the foreseeable future, anyone eligible for the vaccine will be notified.

Can I choose which vaccine I receive?

No, you will not have an option. At this time, the only vaccine available is the Pfizer vaccine. If the Moderna vaccine is approved, it is still not expected that people will have a choice.

Is the vaccine safe for anyone 16 years of age or older?

- If you are considering getting pregnant, already pregnant, or breastfeeding, you should talk to your OB/GYN to discuss your personal risk of getting the virus and whether or not you should receive the vaccine at this time.
- If you typically have a severe reaction to other vaccinations or IVs or have other health concerns, talk to your primary care provider.

If I have allergies can I still get the vaccine?

In the United Kingdom, which already started vaccination, there have been 2 instances of people having a severe allergic reaction (both were fine after treatment). These are both people who have had

anaphylactic reactions to IV medications with these same ingredients in the past. Having a severe allergy to dust or dogs or certain foods is not a contraindication. If you carry an epi-pen because you get anaphylaxis from IV or IM medications, then you may want to discuss with your primary care provider the best strategy.

Is HCRS requiring that staff get the vaccine?

No, while we strongly recommend getting the vaccine, it is not mandatory. There will not be any requirements at this time for staff who don't get the vaccine, but we can't predict whether or not that will change in the future.

I'm working from home so why do I need the vaccine?

There are several reasons to get the vaccine as soon as it becomes available to you:

- **The individual choices each of us makes will have a collective impact and will impact the health of our communities.** Approximately 75% of Americans will need to get the vaccine in order to see the impact of herd immunity.
- You never know when you will be needed to come back to your worksite. Although you may be able to work from home, you may also be able to provide better services once you're back onsite.
- Every member of SLT plans to get the vaccine as soon as it's available to them. All HCRS staff have already been prioritized based on their role and status. Priority is given as follows:
    - Emergency services
    - In person work
    - Support positions
    - Staff working remotely

Should I expect to miss some work due to symptoms after being vaccinated?

Systemic signs and symptoms following COVID-19 vaccination can include fever, fatigue, headache, chills, or muscle and joint pain. Most are mild to moderate in severity, occur within the first 3 days of vaccination, and resolve within 1-2 days of onset.

Cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell are not consistent with post-vaccination symptoms and may indicate a COVID-19 infection, which would have been received in some other manner than from the vaccine.

We don't expect staff to have severe symptoms that would preclude them from working, but of course it is possible. If that occurs, and staff have questions about sick time, they should contact Human Resources. Questions about symptoms following vaccination should be directed to our COVID phone lines.

Will this be my only chance to get the vaccine?

No, but it is your chance to have the most impact to stop the spread in our community. We do anticipate that once priority groups have been vaccinated nationally we will be able to provide vaccines in our primary care offices. The date for that transition is not yet known.

How much will the vaccine cost me?

The vaccines will be free, however, depending on where you receive the vaccine, there may be a small fee for giving it to you. Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient's insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund.

Should I have my children vaccinated?

The Pfizer vaccine is only approved for people 16 years of age and older. Further testing is needed to ensure the safety of use in children under 16.

Do I need to continue wearing my mask and social distancing after I receive the vaccine?

Yes, while experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real life conditions, it will be important to continue with PPE and distancing to help stop the pandemic. The COVID-19 vaccination together with all our health and safety protocols will offer the best protection from getting and/or spreading the coronavirus.

Once we show that we have finally stopped the spread of this disease, then we will be able to throw away our masks and hug our friends and family.

As I decide whether or not to get the vaccine, are there long-term effects of the COVID-19 virus that I should consider?

According to the CDC, in addition to potential severe symptoms from the virus, there are many possible long-term effects. These can include brain fog, depression, muscle aches, and a fever. Additional more serious long term complications can also arise including inflammation of the heart, lung or kidney issues, and memory or hair loss.

Symptoms arising from the virus are much worse than any potential symptoms from getting the vaccine. And, as we know, the virus can result in death.

Where can I learn more about the COVID vaccines?

For even more information about COVID-19 vaccines, visit:

- Vermont Department of Health website

- FDA Advisory Committee Meeting Information: https://www.fda.gov/media/144245/download
- NEJM article on the Pfizer vaccine: Safety and Efficacy of the BNT162b2 mRNA Covid-19 Vaccine | NEJM
- https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html
- Pfizer Vaccine Fact Sheet