Have questions about COVID-19 shots?

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Updated July 22, 2022

WHAT IS COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an illness caused by a virus spreading in our WV communities and around the world. People with COVID-19 can have a range of symptoms, from mild sickness to serious illness that needs hospital treatment, or worse. Each body reacts differently to the virus. Some otherwise healthy people can get very sick, with symptoms lasting months and longer (often called "post-COVID conditions" or "long COVID"). COVID-19 disease can have long-term health consequences, even for those with mild cases.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR COVID-19?

Everyone of all ages and backgrounds is at risk. The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person, mainly through droplets produced when an infected person exhales or speaks, and especially when they yell, sing, cough, or sneeze. Risk for most severe illness increases with age and underlying conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. However, anyone can get severe disease, and many new cases of COVID-19 in West Virginia are primarily among younger people.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO PROTECT AGAINST COVID-19?

Vaccination is the best way to build protection. Vaccination is safer than fighting the virus without immunity from the vaccine; it protects from other strains of the virus; and it is effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19. Tools such as wearing masks, avoiding crowds, and hand washing provide layers of protection by reducing the spread of the virus.

ARE THE COVID-19 VACCINES SAFE?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccines were evaluated in tens of thousands of volunteers in clinical trials that met the same rigorous standards set by the U.S. FDA for all vaccines. Although side effects from vaccination can occur, they are usually mild to moderate and short lived. Severe reactions to the vaccine are extremely rare (see more below). COVID-19 vaccines have been safely administered to billions of people in the U.S. and around the world. COVID-19 vaccines have had the most robust safety monitoring in history.

ARE THE COVID-19 VACCINES EFFECTIVE?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe COVID-19 disease, hospitalizations, and death. Keeping up-to-date with vaccination, including booster shots when due, is the best protection against existing variants and for trying to stop new variants from forming (variants are new strains that happen when a virus is able to spread and mutate).

WHO CAN GET VACCINATED/BOOSTED AGAINST COVID-19, AND WHEN?

West Virginians ages 6 months and older are eligible for COVID-19 vaccination.

To stay up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccination for maximum protection against COVID-19:

- **First**, all individuals ages 6 months and older need a **primary series** (this is the initial set of shots that teaches the body to recognize and fight the virus).

- **Next**, most people ages 5+ need to **get boosted** (booster shots help remind your body what it learned from the primary series: how to fight off the virus).
    - Those ages 5+ are recommended to get a first **booster shot**.
    - Some individuals, such as those ages 50+ and some others, also need a **second booster shot** to stay protected**.**

For a simplified way to find out when to get a COVID-19 shot:

All West Virginians are encouraged to **use the WV COVID-19 Vaccination Due Date Calculator** by scrolling down at vaccinate.wv.gov. The CVDD Calc is a free, online tool that can quickly help anyone figure out when they are due for a COVID-19 shot. West Virginians can also contact the 24/7 WV COVID-19 Hotline by calling 1-800-887-4304 to learn when they are due or ask other COVID-19 vaccination questions.

Note: For primary series vaccination, mRNA COVID-19 vaccines (i.e., Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech) and the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine are recommended. For booster vaccination, mRNA vaccines are recommended when an individual is eligible. Johnson & Johnson should only be used in limited situations.

Note: Those who have received monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma can start or continue COVID-19 vaccination right away.

- For more COVID-19 vaccine eligibility information, visit: https://bit.ly/C19Vax4SpecificPpl
- For more COVID-19 vaccine booster information, visit: https://bit.ly/COVID19vaxBooster

ARE THERE OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMUNOCOMPROMISED PEOPLE?

Yes. For certain people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised and receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) for their primary series, an "additional primary dose" (another shot in the primary series) is recommended before the booster shot(s).

This additional mRNA COVID-19 shot following the primary vaccination series is given to people who may not have gained a strong enough immune response due to underlying medical conditions and/or medications. (This additional primary shot is not the booster shot).

There are also considerations related to the timing of certain shots and the number of booster shots.

For a simplified way to find out when to get a COVID-19 shot, all West Virginians are encouraged to use the **WV COVID-19 Vaccination Due Date Calculator** by scrolling down at vaccinate.wv.gov. The CVDD Calc is a free, online tool that can quickly help anyone figure out when they are due for a COVID-19 shot, **including for those who are moderately to severely immunocompromised.** West Virginians can also contact the 24/7 WV COVID-19 Hotline by calling 1-800-887-4304 to learn when they are due or ask other COVID-19 vaccination questions.

- For more general COVID-19 vaccine eligibility information, visit: https://bit.ly/C19Vax4SpecificPpl
- For more information about COVID-19 vaccination for those who are immunocompromised, visit: https://bit.ly/C19AddlDose
- For a list of medications that cause a person to be considered moderately to severely immunocompromised, visit: https://bit.ly/ModSevImmunocomp
- For more COVID-19 vaccine booster information, visit: https://bit.ly/COVID19vaxBooster

ARE THERE COVID-19 VACCINE SIDE EFFECTS?

Sometimes. Some people have mild to moderate side effects that happen within the first few days of vaccination, and others don't feel anything. Side effects after vaccination are a sign the body is building immunity to fight the virus. Common responses are pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site. Some people also feel tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever, or nausea.

Hundreds of millions in the U.S. have received COVID-19 vaccines under the most rigorous safety monitoring in history. The known risks of COVID-19 illness and its complications far outweigh potential risks of having a rare adverse reaction to vaccination. Safety reports have identified extremely rare adverse events: https://bit.ly/C19vaxRareEvents

WHAT IS MYOCARDITIS/PERICARDITIS, AND HOW IS IT RELATED TO COVID-19?

Myocarditis/pericarditis is inflammation in or around the heart. Many things cause heart inflammation, such as viral or bacterial infections and medical conditions. Myocarditis/pericarditis can happen from COVID-19 disease. In very rare cases, it has been reported after mRNA COVID-19 vaccination (Pfizer or Moderna), particularly among male teens and young adults.

Risk of myocarditis/pericarditis after COVID-19 vaccination is lower than risk of myocarditis from getting COVID-19 disease. The known risks of COVID-19 illness and its complications far outweigh potential risks of having a rare adverse reaction to vaccination.

HOW DO COVID-19 VACCINES WORK?

COVID-19 vaccines work by helping the body's immune system build antibodies to recognize and fight the virus.

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna) are made of sugar, salts, lipids (fats), and messenger RNA (mRNA). The mRNA is used to make protein, which teaches our cells how to recognize the virus. COVID-19 vaccines cannot affect or interact with our DNA in any way. The mRNA breaks down and goes away quickly, leaving in its place the blueprint for protection.

Protein subunit vaccines (for example, Novavax) package harmless proteins alongside another ingredient called an adjuvant that helps the immune system respond to the virus in the future. Vaccines using protein subunits have been used for more than 30 years in the U.S., such as for influenza and whooping cough.

WHAT ARE "VARIANTS" AND HOW DO THEY RELATE TO VACCINATION?

Viruses constantly change, allowing new variants (or strains) of a virus to form. Some variants spread more easily and quickly. Getting any strain can lead to severe illness, including in younger people. COVID-19 shots protect against the virus and are the strongest tool to prevent new variants from forming.

IF I HAD COVID-19 AND RECOVERED, SHOULD I STILL GET A COVID-19 SHOT?

Yes. You are at risk of contracting COVID-19 again without protection from vaccination. Immunity from previously having COVID-19 can wear off, and previous infection does **not** give adequate protection against new variants. People who had minimal or no symptoms with a previous COVID-19 infection could get severe disease with another infection. Someone who currently has COVID-19 may get vaccinated after their isolation period.

ARE COVID-19 VACCINES SAFE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE PREGNANT, BREASTFEEDING, OR WANT TO BECOME PREGNANT?

Yes. People who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or want to become pregnant are recommended to get vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccine safety monitoring and research studies have not identified any concerns for vaccinated pregnant people or their babies. Vaccinated pregnant and breastfeeding people can even pass along immunity to protect their babies for a few months.

Also, pregnant and recently pregnant people who get COVID-19 **disease** have an increased risk of severe illness and pregnancy complications, such as preterm birth and stillbirth. Pregnant people with symptomatic COVID-19 have a 70% increased risk of death.

For those considering pregnancy, research has shown vaccination is safe for fertility (getting pregnant) and safe for early pregnancy outcomes. In fact, some of the COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial participants became pregnant, and many West Virginians have gotten pregnant after vaccination.

IS IT OK TO GET A COVID-19 SHOT WHEN GETTING OTHER VACCINES?

Yes. COVID-19 shots can be received at and around the same time as others, such as a flu shot or other immunizations.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO GET/GIVE COVID-19 TO OTHERS BY GETTING VACCINATED?

No. It is impossible for COVID-19 vaccines to infect anyone with the virus that causes COVID-19.

ARE THE COVID-19 VACCINES FREE?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccines are readily available and currently free of charge for the person getting vaccinated.

WHERE CAN I GET VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19?

Contact a healthcare provider to see if they carry the COVID-19 vaccine, visit vaccinate.wv.gov for more information about vaccination locations, **or call the WV COVID-19 Vaccine Info Line at 1-833-734-0965** (M-F 8am-6pm, Sat. 9am-5pm). Those caring for someone who is homebound can call to make vaccination arrangements.

When you are vaccinated, you will receive a COVID-19 vaccination record card. Bring this card with you to any other COVID-19 vaccine appointments.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I NEED TO REPLACE MY COVID-19 VACCINATION CARD?

Your vaccination location(s) may provide you with a replacement card. If not, you may request a replacement COVID-19 vaccination card from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources: https://bit.ly/WVcovidCardreplace.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFO ABOUT COVID-19 & COVID-19 VACCINES?

- CDC: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines
- US Government COVID-19 "One Stop Shop": COVID.gov
- American Academy of Pediatrics: healthychildren.org
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: www.acog.org/womens-health
- AARP Coronavirus Information: www.aarp.org/coronavirus/