Have questions about COVID–19 shots?

To view these Frequently Asked Questions and additional resources online, hover over this QR code with your smartphone camera and click on the link that pops up.

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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.

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

Vaccination is the best way to build protection against getting very sick, needing to stay in the hospital, or even dying from COVID-19 if you get the virus. Vaccination is safer than fighting the virus without immunity from the vaccine; it helps to protect against other strains of the virus; and it is effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19. Tools such as improving ventilation, 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 several clinical trials and have been safely administered to billions of people in the U.S. and around the world. Although side effects from vaccination can occur, they are usually mild and brief. Severe reactions to the vaccine are extremely rare (see more below). With the most robust safety monitoring in history, COVID-19 vaccines are safe for those ages 6 months and older.

ARE THE COVID-19 VACCINES EFFECTIVE?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe disease. Keeping up-to-date with vaccination is the best protection against existing variants (variants are new strains that happen when a virus is able to spread and mutate). Even if you do test positive for COVID, being up-to-date on your COVID-19 shots means you're far less likely to get very sick, need hospital care, or die from the disease.

WHO IS CONSIDERED UP-TO-DATE ON COVID-19 SHOTS?

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, now everyone ages 6 months and older is eligible for at least one Omicron (bivalent) mRNA COVID-19 shot. To be considered up-to-date:

- **Ages 6+ years:** Those ages 6+ years should have had, or get, at least 1 Omicron (bivalent) updated mRNA COVID-19 shot, regardless of vaccine history.

- **Ages 6 months – 5 years:** Those under age 6 have specific guidance for their number of COVID-19 shots based on their age, COVID-19 vaccine type, and their vaccination history. Talk to a healthcare provider or learn more here: https://bit.ly/C19CDCUpToDate

- **For Ages 65+ years:** Those ages 65+ years are eligible for another Omicron (bivalent) mRNA COVID-19 shot at least 4 months after their first Omicron (bivalent) shot.

- **For Moderately to Severely Immunocompromised*:** Those who are **ages 6+ years** and moderately to severely immunocompromised are eligible for another Omicron (bivalent) shot at least 2 months after their first Omicron (bivalent) mRNA COVID-19 shot. Thereafter, healthcare providers can determine the need on an individual basis for additional Omicron (bivalent) mRNA COVID-19 shots at least 2 months apart, as needed based on the level of immunocompromise (for conditions such as stem cell transplant, CAR-T therapy, B-cell depletion, and others).

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

All West Virginians are encouraged to use the COVID-19 Vaccination Due Date Calculator by scrolling down at vaccinate.wv.gov. The calculator is a free, online tool that can quickly help anyone figure out when they are due for a COVID-19 shot, what type, and where to get one. West Virginians can also contact the WV COVID-19 Vaccine Info Line at 1-833-734-0965 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm).

* People who are moderately to severely immunocompromised may require more frequent vaccination due to underlying medical conditions and/or medication.

**Note: mRNA COVID-19 vaccines (i.e., Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech) are preferred. The Novavax COVID-19 vaccine are recommended for those who cannot or will not receive an mRNA vaccine. Johnson & Johnson vaccination should only be used in limited situations. For more information, talk to a healthcare provider or visit the links below.

- For more COVID-19 vaccine eligibility information, visit: https://bit.ly/C19Vax4SpecificPpl
- For more on staying up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccination, visit: https://bit.ly/COVID19vaxBooster
- 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

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 COVID-19 vaccination, particularly among male teens and young adults.

Risk of myocarditis/pericarditis after COVID-19 vaccination is lower than risk of myocarditis/pericarditis 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. Staying up-to-date with vaccination is the best protection against existing variants and for trying to stop new variants from forming.

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines have been updated to include protection against the original strain and more recent Omicron strains. Now, all COVID-19 mRNA vaccination is with the Omicron (bivalent) updated COVID-19 shot, and the original (monovalent) mRNA COVID-19 vaccine is no longer used.

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

Yes. Immunity from having COVID-19 can wear off, and previous infection does **not** give adequate protection against new variants. Even those who had minimal or no symptoms with prior COVID could get severe disease with another infection. People who currently have COVID-19 may get vaccinated after their isolation period. Those who recently had COVID may consider delaying COVID-19 vaccination by 3 months from infection but should consider their disease risk factors and discuss with a healthcare provider.

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 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 other routine vaccines, such as a flu shot. Some people might consider waiting 4 weeks after Mpox (orthopoxvirus) vaccination.

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 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 9am-5pm). Call for vaccination arrangements for someone who is homebound.

When you are vaccinated, you will receive a COVID-19 Vaccination 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/

Note: This FAQ is current as of 4/26/23. Guidelines may change. More on CDC guidance: https://bit.ly/CDCc19vaxMain