

COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: December 23, 2020

General information

When can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Mass General Brigham is following guidance from public health officials. The first wave of people who can get the vaccine are frontline health care workers. Patients in long-term care facilities and nursing homes can also get the vaccine.

When will the vaccine be available to the general public?

Currently, Massachusetts [public health officials](#) think the general public will be able to get the vaccine sometime between April and June 2021. Access will be coordinated through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

If you are high risk, are 65 and older, or work in certain jobs like education, transit or public works, you might be able to receive the vaccine sooner, between February and April. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has more information on their web site about who is [high risk for severe illness](#) and about when the vaccine may be [available to the general public](#).

Can children get the vaccine?

Currently the vaccine the Pfizer vaccine is approved for children ages 16 and older. The Moderna vaccine is not approved for children. It is approved for adults aged 18 and older.

How do we know the vaccine works?

The COVID-19 vaccine has proven to be extremely effective. According to Phase 3 trials, the [Pfizer vaccine](#) is 95% effective 7 days after the second dose. The [Moderna vaccine](#) is 94% effective 14 days after the second dose. These results were consistent across gender, age, race and ethnicity.

How long will immunity last after I get vaccinated? Will I need to be vaccinated every year?

We do not know this yet. The clinical trials will continue to monitor participants to see how long protection lasts. We will provide updated information as it becomes available.

Because we don't yet know how long immunity will last, it's still important to [wash your hands, wear a mask, and socially distance](#).

Can we stop wearing masks and social distancing after getting vaccinated?

No, not yet. We know that the vaccine protects you from getting sick, but we do not know if it stops you from giving it to other people. Since not everyone will get the vaccine right away, we must be careful to protect others. Even if you get the vaccine, you should still wear a mask, practice social distancing, and wash your hands. Infection control experts will let us know when it is safe to modify or stop these safety measures.

Why do we need to get the vaccine if we're wearing masks and social distancing?

We need to use all the tools available to us to stop the pandemic. Together, the COVID-19 vaccine and simple everyday actions like wearing a mask and social distancing will offer the best protection from COVID-19. And even though the vaccines are 90% to 95% effective, you still don't know how effective it will be for you. About 5% to 10% of people immunized may still get the virus. You should do everything you can to reduce your risk of getting the virus and passing it to others.

Can people get COVID-19 from a vaccine?

No. The vaccine does not contain the whole or live virus and therefore cannot cause COVID-19.

I already had COVID-19. Should I get vaccinated?

Yes, when it becomes available to you, you can still get the vaccine if you have had COVID-19 and have recovered. If you are actively sick with COVID-19 or have [symptoms that could be from COVID-19](#), you should not get the vaccine.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Some people do get side effects after receiving the vaccine. For both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, most mild side effects resolve within a day or so.

- The most commonly reported symptoms from the Pfizer vaccine have been pain at the site of vaccination, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, and chills.
- The most commonly reported symptoms from the Moderna vaccine have been pain at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, swollen lymph nodes in the same arm as the injection, nausea and vomiting, and fever.

Where can I find more information?

- Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html>
- When vaccine is limited, who gets vaccinated first? - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations.html>
- COVID-19 Vaccine in Massachusetts - <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine-in-massachusetts>
- People at higher risk for severe illness - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#People-at-Higher-Risk-for-Severe-Illness>
- Food and Drug administration Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine - <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine>
- Food and Drug administration Moderna COVID-19 vaccine - <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/moderna-covid-19-vaccine>
- Mass General Brigham COVID-19 website - <https://www.massgeneralbrigham.org/covid19>

Allergies

Should I be concerned about allergic reactions to the COVID-19 Vaccine?

There have been some reports of people having allergic reactions after getting the vaccine. A small number of people had a severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Based on this, the US Food and Drug Administration and the CDC recommends that people with a history of anaphylaxis to any of the ingredients in the COVID19 vaccine should **not** get the vaccine. People with other food or medication allergies can receive the vaccine.

In general, most patients allergic to one vaccine can receive other vaccinations safely. If you have a history of severe allergic reactions to vaccines, injectable therapies, or any component of the COVID-19 vaccine you are going to receive, you should talk to your primary care provider or allergist (if you have one). Your provider can help you decide if it is safe to get vaccinated.

What are the ingredients in the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 Vaccines?

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines do not contain gelatin, egg, or latex. Also, the vial stoppers are not made with natural rubber latex. Patients who have latex allergies can receive the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines contain **polyethylene glycol**. Reactions to Polyethylene glycol are very rare. Patients with a history of having an allergic reaction to polyethylene glycol should talk to their provider before receiving either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

Ingredients of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 Vaccines

	Pfizer-BioNTech	Moderna
Active	Nucleoside-modified messenger RNA (modRNA) encoding the viral spike (S) glycoprotein of SARS-CoV-2.	Nucleoside-modified mRNA encoding the viral spike (S) glycoprotein of SARS-CoV-2
Inactive - lipids	(4-hydroxybutyl)azanediylbis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis(2-hexyldecanoate)	SM-102 (Proprietary to Moderna)
	2[(polyethylene glycol [PEG]-2000)-N,N-ditetradecylacetamide	Polyethylene glycol (PEG) 2000 dimyristoyl glycerol (DMG)
	1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine	1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine
	Cholesterol	Cholesterol
Inactive – salts, sugars, buffers	Potassium chloride, monobasic potassium phosphate, sodium chloride, dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate	Tromethamine, tromethamine hydrochloride, acetic acid, sodium acetate
	Sugar (sucrose)	Sugar (sucrose)
	The diluent, added to the vaccine for administration, is saline (Sodium Chloride)	No diluent needed