

# 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.

**Note:** While the information in this FAQ is current as of the listed date, guidelines are subject to change.

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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, and many new cases of COVID-19 in West Virginia are among younger people.

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

**Vaccination is the best way to build protection against getting very sick, needing hospital care, 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 COVID-19 disease, hospitalizations, and death. Keeping up-to-date with vaccination, including booster shots when due, 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.

p.1



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

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**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**, some children ages 6 months to 5 years, and most ages 5 years and up need to **get boosted** (boosters help the body restore immunity when protection from the primary series starts to fade).
  - At this time, some children ages 6 months and older and most ages 5 years and older should get one Omicron (bivalent) booster shot when due\*.

### 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 (CVDD)** by scrolling down at [vaccinate.wv.gov](https://vaccinate.wv.gov). The CVDD Calculator 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 for most people, original (monovalent) mRNA COVID-19 vaccines (i.e., Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech) and the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine are recommended. For booster vaccination, Omicron (bivalent) mRNA vaccines are recommended when an individual is eligible, and Novavax should only be used in certain limited situations. Johnson & Johnson vaccination should only be used in limited situations. Updated Omicron (bivalent) vaccine eligibility can vary for ages 6 months to 5 years – 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>

## ARE THERE OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMUNOCOMPROMISED PEOPLE?

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**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.

In addition to vaccination, some immunocompromised people ages 12 years and older may be eligible for Evusheld, a medicine given every six months for more protection against the virus that causes COVID-19. Talk to a healthcare provider to learn about this option, and read more at: <https://bit.ly/CDCEvusheld>.

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 (CVDD)** by scrolling down at [vaccinate.wv.gov](https://vaccinate.wv.gov). The CVDD Calculator 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 to ask other COVID-19 vaccination questions.

- For more information about COVID-19 vaccination for those who are immunocompromised, visit: <https://bit.ly/C19AddIDose>
- For a list of medications that cause a person to be considered moderately to severely immunocompromised, visit: <https://bit.ly/ModSevImmunocomp>

p.2



## ARE THERE COVID-19 VACCINE SIDE EFFECTS?

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**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?

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**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 (Moderna, Novavax, and Pfizer), 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?

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**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?

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**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, including booster shots when due, is the best protection against existing variants and for trying to stop new variants from forming.

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

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**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?**

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**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?**

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**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 Monkeypox (orthopoxvirus) vaccination.

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

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

## **ARE THE COVID-19 VACCINES FREE?**

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

## **WHERE CAN I GET VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19?**

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**Contact a healthcare provider to see if they carry the COVID-19 vaccine, visit [vaccinate.wv.gov](https://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). Call for vaccination arrangements for someone who is homebound.

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?**

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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?**

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

