

**COVID-19 Vaccine Information / FAQ – December 2020**

Both the **Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine** and the **Moderna vaccine** for COVID-19 have been fully approved for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Both require two doses—Pfizer 21 days apart; Moderna 28 days apart— and the second dose is believed to confer much more immunity than the first. It is recommended that you take both doses from the same company.

**What are the COVID vaccines and are they effective?**

The COVID vaccines are the world’s first mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) vaccines, but the technology used to create them is not new. The mRNA vaccine tricks the body into making the COVID-19 protein itself, which in turn triggers an immune response and antibodies. The mRNA *does not enter* a cell’s nucleus, so it does not alter the recipient’s own DNA.

The Pfizer vaccine has proven to be 95% effective in clinical trials; Moderna 94.1% effective. By comparison, the CDC says recent studies show that the flu vaccine reduces the risk of flu illness by between 40% and 60% among the overall population.

**Are the new COVID vaccines safe?**

The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible, according to the CDC. In the case of the COVID vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, no scientific steps were skipped. The approval process was sped up, but no corners were cut. One of the biggest differences was that Phase 2 was begun while Phase I was still happening. Steps like funding and permission applications were accelerated. It should also be noted that mRNA is manufactured by chemical rather than biological synthesis, so it is much quicker than conventional vaccines to be redesigned, scaled up and mass-produced.

**The Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccines *do not* contain live virus. They *do not include* SARS-CoV2 and they cannot give you COVID.**

**Are there any side effects?**

Side effects for both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were generally mild and temporary and may include pain at the injection site, headache, fever, fatigue, chills and muscle and joint pain. *Note: the side effects are very similar to those reported with the annual flu shot on the CDC website.*

There is a remote chance of an allergic reaction, which usually occurs within a few minutes to one hour after receiving a dose. If you are allergic to any of the ingredients, you should not take the vaccine. (The ingredients are listed below.)

**Does the vaccine make me immune to COVID?**

The vaccine is designed to prevent you from getting COVID, but timing is critical. It takes a few days for the body to make antibodies, and you could be vulnerable to contracting the disease in between your first and second dose.

It is not known yet how long the vaccine confers immunity--- it could be months, it could be years. All the vaccine manufacturers are continuing to study this.

**Even after receiving the vaccine, you should continue to mask, social distance and practice hand hygiene.**

**If I get the COVID vaccine, can I still contract and transmit the disease to someone else?**

Getting the vaccine is expected to confer some immunity upon the recipient but it is not known how much and whether the recipient can transmit the disease. Asymptomatic transmission may still be possible.

**If I already had COVID, should I get vaccinated?**

Yes. The CDC believes the vaccine will still be beneficial as it is not known how long a person’s immunity from the disease lasts. You could be re-infected, and the vaccine may help prevent that.

**Who should NOT get the vaccine?**

You should not get the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine if you

* had a severe allergic reaction after a previous dose of this vaccine
* had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient of this vaccine (ingredients below)

***Ingredients in the Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine:*** *mRNA, lipids ((4-hydroxybutyl)azanediyl)bis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis(2-hexyldecanoate), 2 [(polyethylene glycol)-2000]-N,N-ditetradecylacetamide, 1,2-Distearoyl-sn-glycero-3- phosphocholine, and cholesterol), potassium chloride, monobasic potassium phosphate, sodium chloride, dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate, and sucrose.*

***Ingredients in the Moderna vaccine:*** *mRNA; Lipids (SM-102, 1,2-dimyristoyl-rac-glycero3-methoxypolyethylene glycol-2000 [PEG2000-DMG], cholesterol, and 1,2-distearoyl-snglycero-3-phosphocholine [DSPC]);tromethamine; tromethamine hydrochloride; acetic acid; sodium acetate; sucrose*

**Can I get the vaccine if I’m pregnant?**

None of the clinical trials involved pregnant women, so it’s recommended that you discuss the vaccine with your healthcare provider.

**Tell your vaccination provider about ANY medical conditions you might have, including:**

* allergies
* fever
* bleeding disorders or if you are on a blood thinner
* if you are immunocompromised or are on a medicine that affects your immune system
* are pregnant or plan to be
* are breastfeeding
* have received another COVID-19 vaccine

**Will the COVID vaccine have to be given every year like the flu vaccine?**

It is not known if the COVID virus will mutate or change from year to year, so the possibility of a yearly vaccine—or booster— is not entirely off the radar.

**Is the vaccine free and is it recorded anywhere?**

The U.S. government has purchased 100 million doses apiece from Moderna and Pfizer to be given at no cost to taxpayers according to the CDC. However vaccine providers will be able to charge an administration fee. That fee can be reimbursed through insurance or a government COVID relief fund**.** The vaccination provider may include your vaccination information in your state/local jurisdiction’s Immunization Information System (IIS) or other designated system. This will ensure that you receive the same vaccine when you return for the second dose.

*Primary sources: CDC, NIH, FDA, Pfizer, Moderna, Johns Hopkins. See:* [*Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines (cdc.gov)*](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits/facts.html)