



Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative

Vaccine Education Campaign FAQs

3/5/21

FAQs

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe?

Yes. Vaccines are safe and are one of the best ways to protect yourself and those around you from getting sick from COVID-19. Getting the vaccine will help save lives.

COVID-19 vaccines available in Massachusetts are made by three companies: [Moderna](#), [Pfizer](#), and [Johnson & Johnson/Janssen](#). These vaccines were authorized by the Federal Food and Drug Administration only after they were shown to be safe and effective in studies (called clinical trials).

Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. The vaccine doesn't contain the virus that causes COVID-19, so it can't make you sick. You may experience mild side effects after getting the vaccine, but this is a sign that your body is learning how to protect you.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine free?

The vaccine is free.

Who can get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Anyone who lives, works, or studies in Massachusetts can get a vaccine when they become eligible under the State's guidelines.

How do I know if I'm eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

You can visit this [website](#) or call 211 to see if you are eligible to receive the vaccine under the State's phased rollout.

Ok. I'm eligible. How do I make an appointment?

You can visit this [website](#) to make an appointment or call 211. You can also reach out to your local community organization to assist you with the process. We are working with CIC Health to schedule appointments for those in our community.

I don't have health insurance, can I still get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. The provider may ask if you have health insurance, but it is not a requirement to get the vaccine. You will not receive a bill.

I'm undocumented. Can I get the vaccine? Will it impact my immigration status?

You can get vaccinated even if you are undocumented. Getting a vaccine will not impact you or your family's immigration status. The Public Charge rule does NOT apply to getting the vaccine.

There are soldiers working at the vaccination clinics, are you sure they won't report me?

The National Guard is here to help. They are members of the local community who want to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Many speak different languages. They will not ask you any questions relating to immigration status.

How does the COVID-19 vaccine work?

Vaccines help our immune system fight infections in the future. The COVID-19 vaccine will protect us from the virus that causes COVID-19 without having to get the illness.

The vaccine will help protect you by teaching your body how to recognize and fight the virus. The vaccine can help keep you from getting COVID-19, but even if you do get the virus, it can keep you from getting very sick.

How many doses of the vaccine do I need?

The Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines are given in two doses. You need both doses to be fully protected. The second dose of Moderna is given 28 days after the first dose. The second dose of Pfizer is given 21 days after the first dose. The Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine requires only a single dose to be protected.

After I get the required doses, how long does it take till I'm fully protected?

It takes a few weeks after the second dose to become fully protected.

What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

You may have a sore arm, aches, fatigue, or fever for a few days after getting the vaccine. These symptoms are a sign that your immune system is learning how to protect you from the virus. Most people experience worsened side effects after the second dose. These side effects may affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. These temporary side effects are a better alternative to getting COVID-19.

For the Pfizer vaccine, the most common side effects are pain at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, and fever.

For the Moderna vaccine, the most common side effects are pain, tenderness, swelling and redness at the injection site, as well as fatigue, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, chills, nausea and vomiting, and fever.

I don't trust that the vaccine was developed so quickly. How can we know it's safe?

We understand the importance of being open and honest about the safety and development of the vaccine— especially for communities who have suffered consequences of medical mistreatment. The COVID-19 vaccine was developed quickly but all of the same safety steps were followed for this vaccine that are used for all vaccines. No corners were cut on safety.

The vaccines were developed quickly because:

- **They used existing research and information on coronavirus:** COVID-19 is part of a family of viruses that has been studied for a long time. The vaccine developers used this existing research to help develop the COVID-19 vaccine.
- **Governments funded vaccine research:** The United States and other governments invested a lot of money to help vaccine companies with their work. Working together with other countries also helped researchers move quickly.
- **Tens of thousands of people participated in vaccine studies:** Studies of the vaccine (called Clinical Trials) were conducted to prove the vaccine is safe and effective. Tens of thousands of people signed up for the studies, so companies did not need to spend a lot of time finding volunteers.
- **Manufacturing happened at the same time as the safety studies:** Vaccine companies started making the vaccine at the same time as studies were happening in hopes that it would be proven safe and effective. This meant vaccines were ready to be distributed once they were approved.

What was the process to test the vaccines?

It's important to know that vaccines go through more testing than any other pharmaceuticals. First, small groups of people receive the trial vaccine. Next, vaccine is given to people with particular characteristics (e.g., age, race, and physical health). Then, vaccine is given to tens of thousands of people and tested for effectiveness and safety.

After that, the CDC's [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices](#) (ACIP) looks at the data to see whether the vaccine works and is safe. They give advice to the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA looks at the data and the advice from the ACIP and decides whether to approve the vaccine. The vaccine is only approved after all of these steps are done, and the experts are sure that it works and is safe.

Please visit [Ensuring the Safety of COVID-19 Vaccines in the United States | CDC](#) for more information.

Who were the vaccines tested on? Were people of color represented in clinical trials? Was my community represented?

Yes. The safety of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine was evaluated in people 16 years of age and older in two clinical studies conducted in the United States, Europe, Turkey, South Africa, and South America. Overall, 50.6% of participants were male and 49.4% were female, 83.1% were White, 9.1% were Black or African American, 28.0% were Hispanic or Latino, 4.3% were Asian, and 0.5% were American Indian or Alaska Native. ([Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine EUA Fact Sheet for HCP revised 01-06-2021](#))

The safety of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine was evaluated in people 18 years of age and older in the United States. Overall, 52.7% of participants were male, 47.3% were female, 79.2% were White, 10.2% were Black or African American, 20.5% were Hispanic or Latino, 4.6% were Asian, 0.8% were American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.2% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 2.1% were Other, and 2.1% were Multiracial. ([Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine EUA Fact Sheet for Healthcare Providers](#))

The safety of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine was evaluated in people 18 years of age and older. Overall, 45.3% of participants in the clinical trials identify as Hispanic/Latino, 19.4% Black or African American, 16.7% white, 9.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, 3.3% Asian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 5.6% Multiracial.

There have been no studies in people who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

In addition, since the vaccines were approved, millions of people of different races and ethnicities have been vaccinated, and most have only experienced mild side effects.

Are there long-term side effects to the vaccine?

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are what experts call messenger RNA vaccines, or mRNA vaccines for short. mRNA vaccines have been studied in animal and human trials for years. On the other hand, COVID-19 has only been around for about a year and the long-term side effects of COVID-19 infection are mostly unknown and may be serious. Therefore, getting vaccinated is the best choice for long-term health and safety.

Experts will continue to track COVID-19 vaccine side effects. People in clinical trials will be tracked for 2 years. Other people who get the vaccine can use a tool called v-safe on their smartphones to quickly tell the CDC if you have any side effects after getting the COVID-19 vaccine. V-safe users can share information for up to one year after their vaccine. Learn more at cdc.gov/vsafe.

Should someone with a history of allergies get the COVID-19 vaccine?

You should not get the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines if you have a history of severe allergic reaction (also called anaphylaxis) to any ingredient in the vaccine. If you have a history of a severe allergic reaction to something else that's not in the vaccine, discuss with your health care provider before receiving the vaccine.

Although there is a small chance that the COVID-19 vaccines could cause a severe allergic reaction, this would usually happen within a few minutes to one hour after getting the vaccine. Everyone, even if they don't have allergies, is monitored for at least 15 minutes after getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

What are the ingredients in the vaccine?

Both Pfizer and Moderna have fact sheets for recipients and caregivers that list the ingredients of each vaccine. Those factsheets can be found at:

- [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine EUA Fact Sheet for Recipients and Caregivers \(fda.gov\)](#) (page 2), and
- [Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine EUA Fact Sheet for Recipients and Caregivers \(fda.gov\)](#) (page 2).

The Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 Vaccine includes the following ingredients: recombinant, replication-incompetent adenovirus type 26 expressing the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein, citric acid monohydrate, trisodium citrate dihydrate, ethanol, 2-hydroxypropyl- β -cyclodextrin (HBCD), polysorbate-80, sodium chloride.

I would like to have a baby one day. Is it safe for me to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. People who want to get pregnant in the future may receive the COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines are being studied carefully now and will continue to be studied for many years, similar to other vaccines. Based on what we know right now, experts believe that COVID-19 vaccines are safe for someone who is trying to become pregnant in the short or long term.

Here's why:

- The COVID-19 vaccine, like other vaccines, works by teaching our bodies to develop antibodies that fight against the virus that causes COVID-19, to prevent future illness.
- There is no evidence right now that antibodies formed from COVID-19 vaccination will cause any problems with pregnancy, including the development of the placenta.
- In fact, there is no evidence that fertility problems are a side effect of ANY vaccine.

People who are trying to become pregnant now or who plan to try in the future may receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available to them. (source: [Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines \(cdc.gov\)](#) as of 1/20/21)

Should someone who is pregnant or breastfeeding get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Currently there are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in people who are pregnant. COVID-19 infection during pregnancy can increase the risk of severe illness and might result in an increased risk of outcomes like preterm birth. Getting vaccinated is a personal choice for people who are pregnant.

There are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in people who are breastfeeding or on the breastfed baby. People who are breastfeeding may choose to be vaccinated. The [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) recommend that COVID-19 vaccines be offered to breastfeeding individuals when they meet prioritization criteria for receiving the vaccine.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding and have questions around getting vaccinated, a discussion with your healthcare provider might help you make an informed decision.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe for children?

At this time, the Pfizer vaccine is authorized for people ages 16 and older. The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are authorized for people ages 18 and older. Younger children and adolescents should not receive COVID-19 vaccination at this time.

Will a COVID-19 vaccine change my DNA?

No. COVID-19 mRNA vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna do not change or interact with your DNA in any way. Messenger RNA vaccines—also called mRNA vaccines—are the first COVID-19 vaccines approved in the United States. mRNA vaccines teach our immune system how to fight against a specific virus. COVID-19 mRNA vaccines work with the body's natural defenses to safely develop immunity to disease. In order to do its job, the mRNA from a COVID-19 vaccine doesn't need to go inside the nucleus of the cell, which is where our DNA is kept. This means the mRNA never interacts with our DNA in any way, and has no way to change it.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is a viral vector vaccine. Viral vector vaccines use a different virus as a vector instead, which delivers important instructions (in the form of a gene) to our cells. For COVID-19 vaccines, a modified virus delivers a gene that instructs our cells to make a SARS-CoV-2 antigen called the spike protein. This antigen triggers production of antibodies and a resulting immune response. The virus used in a viral vector vaccine poses no threat of causing illness in humans because it has been modified or, in some cases, because the type of virus used as the vector cannot cause disease in humans. Learn more at [Understanding and Explaining Viral Vector COVID-19 Vaccines](#).

At the end of the process, our bodies have learned how to protect against future infection. That immune response and making antibodies is what protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies. (source: [Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines \(cdc.gov\)](#) as of 1/20/21)

I heard there were microchips in the COVID-19 vaccines. Is this true?

No. There are no microchips in the vaccines. This is a rumor.

I am religious. Does the COVID-19 vaccine go against my faith?

While we can't answer that question for you, we can ensure that the vaccine is safe and it will save lives. We encourage everyone to get the vaccine, regardless of their faith.

I got COVID-19. Do I still need a vaccine?

Yes, you should be vaccinated regardless of whether you already had COVID-19. That's because experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Even if you have already recovered from COVID-19, it is possible—although rare—that you could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 again. Learn more about [why getting vaccinated is a safer way to build protection](#) than getting infected.

If you were treated for COVID-19 with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma, you should wait 90 days before getting a COVID-19 vaccine. Talk to your doctor if you are unsure what treatments you received or if you have more questions about getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

Experts are still learning more about how long vaccines protect against COVID-19 in real-world conditions. CDC will keep the public informed as new evidence becomes available.

I am currently sick with COVID-19. Can I get the vaccine?

No. People with COVID-19 who have symptoms should wait to be vaccinated until they have recovered from their illness and have met the [criteria](#) for discontinuing isolation; those without symptoms should also wait until they [meet the criteria](#) before getting vaccinated. This guidance also applies to people who get COVID-19 before getting their second dose of vaccine.

I have an underlying condition, should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. Vaccination is an important consideration for adults of any age with certain underlying medical conditions because they are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. People with underlying medical conditions can receive the FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines as long as they have not had [an immediate or severe allergic reaction](#) to a COVID-19 vaccine or to any of the ingredients in the vaccine. Learn more about vaccination [considerations for people with underlying medical conditions](#).

I am fully vaccinated. Do I still need to wear a mask?

Yes. It's important for everyone to continue using all the tools available to help stop this pandemic as we learn more about how COVID-19 vaccines work in real-world conditions. Experts are also looking at how many people get vaccinated and how the virus is spreading in communities. We also don't yet know whether getting a COVID-19 vaccine will prevent you from spreading the virus that causes COVID-19 to other people, even if you don't get sick yourself.