



IDS



## COVID-19 Vaccines: What Are Your Concerns?

version: 2/22/21

This resource was developed by the Infectious Diseases Society of America and its HIV Medicine Association to help frontline staff respond to questions about COVID-19 vaccines. It includes a special section for questions from [people with HIV](#). A more detailed [FAQ on COVID-19 vaccines](#) is available from the [IDS COVID-19 Real-Time Learning Network](#). A more detailed [FAQ on people with HIV](#) and the COVID-19 vaccines is available [from HIVMA](#).

*This resource is based on the COVID-19 vaccines available as of Feb. 22, 2021. The Food and Drug Administration will consider for an emergency use authorization a vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson on Feb. 26. This document will be updated as new information becomes available.*

### How much does the vaccine protect against COVID-19?

- The vaccines we have now will prevent almost all people who get the two shots from getting sick with COVID-19. In studies, of the people who got the vaccine and got sick, few needed to go in the hospital, and no one died from COVID-19.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has [released information](#) on people who have received the vaccines so far, saying it continues to support that the vaccines are safe.

### Do the vaccines work as well in all races and ethnicities?

- The studies included communities of color (Black, Latinx, Native Americans) and showed that the vaccines work just as well in everyone.

### When can I get the vaccine?

- Because we do not have enough vaccine for everyone right now, people who are most likely to either get COVID-19 or get very sick from COVID-19 are getting the vaccine first.
- Each state makes the final decision on who gets the vaccine.
- In most states, health care workers and people who are 65 years and older can get the vaccine. And in others, essential workers can as well. Essential workers are police officers and firefighters, United States postal workers, bus drivers and other transportation workers, grocery store workers, teachers and others. People with HIV who fall into those groups can get the vaccine.
- It can still be hard to get a vaccine even if you are in one of these groups because of the low supply.
- In some states, people with medical problems and at higher risk for getting sick can get a vaccine. In [a few states](#), people with HIV can or will be able to get the vaccine because they have HIV.
- Check with your [local](#) or [state](#) health department for the latest information for your community. Information on your state plan is [available online](#).

### How long does it take for the vaccine to start working and how long does it work?

- It can take a couple weeks after getting the vaccine for your body to respond so you are protected. The current vaccines (mRNA-based vaccines) work best when people get both doses.

- We do not yet know how long the vaccine will provide high levels of protection for people. The virus that causes COVID-19 is still spreading around the U.S. Even a little protection can help you from getting sick from COVID-19.
- While the vaccine can stop you from getting sick from COVID-19, we do not yet know if the vaccines will stop you from getting COVID-19. You may still get it but not have any symptoms, so you could spread it to others. This is why it is important to wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet from others, avoid crowds and get-togethers and regularly wash your hands, even after getting vaccinated.

#### How was the vaccine developed so fast?

- A lot of money and resources were provided to develop COVID-19 vaccines because of how much the pandemic has affected people everywhere.
- The manufacturers were able to use information they have gotten from work they had done on vaccines for other viruses.
- The Food and Drug Administration sets standards to help make sure that vaccines are safe and will work in most people. The COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States did much better than the FDA's standards.

#### What are the long-term effects of getting the vaccine?

- We do not yet know if there will be any long-term effects, but so far there have been very few serious side effects among the millions of people who have gotten the vaccine in the United States. We do know that some people who get COVID-19 will get very sick and some will die.
- Experts will continue to watch for the long-term effects in people who are getting vaccinated.

#### Will I get sick from the COVID-19 vaccines? Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

- Most people will get some side effects a few days after getting the vaccine. These will last up to a few days. Your immune system protects your body from viruses and these side effects are from your immune system's reaction to the vaccine. That means that your body is doing exactly what we want it to do to build protection against COVID-19. These side effects may be stronger after the second shot or if you already have had COVID-19.
- Most people will have pain, swelling, or redness in the arm; other side effects could include feeling tired, having muscle and joint aches, having a headache, or having fever and chills. A small number of people had a serious allergic reaction to the vaccine within 15 minutes to half an hour of receiving it. That reaction can be treated immediately. That is why vaccine providers will ask you to stay for at least 15 minutes, to be watched after receiving the shot.
- The vaccine does not contain the virus that causes COVID-19 and cannot give you COVID-19.

#### Should I get the vaccine if I've had COVID-19?

- The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends](#) getting the vaccine even if you have had COVID-19. This is because we do not know how long the protection from getting sick with COVID-19 lasts. You should not get the vaccine until you feel better and are fully recovered.

#### Can I get a COVID-19 vaccine if I'm pregnant? If I am breastfeeding?

- The CDC and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists advise that people who are pregnant or breastfeeding can receive the vaccine if they wish to take it.
- People who are pregnant are at higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, you may choose to be vaccinated when eligible.

### Do mRNA vaccines cause infertility?

- The vaccines do not cause infertility. This is misinformation or information that is not true that is spread on the Internet.

### Will mRNA vaccines change my DNA?

- The mRNA in vaccines do not enter the part of the cell where your DNA is and cannot change your DNA.

### Were fetal stem cells used to make the COVID-19 vaccines?

- No, fetal stem cells were not used to make the mRNA vaccines.

### Is it necessary to get the second dose of the vaccine?

- Yes – for the vaccines that require two doses (Moderna and Pfizer), you should receive both doses. With just one dose, you will not be protected as well. Also, the protection may not last as long.
- If you can't go back for your second vaccine at the same location, let your vaccine provider know.
- You should get the second dose as close to the day you are supposed to as you can. Sometimes, it is hard to get an appointment or there is not enough vaccine. The CDC says delaying up to six weeks is still okay.

### Can I get one dose of one vaccine and the second dose of the other vaccine?

- The second dose of your vaccine should be the same brand as the first one. You can get a different brand of the vaccine if there is no way you can get the same brand you got for the first dose. However, it would need to be the same type of vaccine. For example, both shots would need to be mRNA vaccines.

## **COVID-19 Vaccines and People with HIV**

### Are the vaccines safe and effective for people with HIV?

- We have limited information from studies about how the vaccines work in people with HIV, but from what we know about how the vaccines work, they should be safe for people with HIV and keep most people from getting sick. Some people with HIV were included in the studies, and more information on safety and effectiveness is expected. The vaccines available now do not have the virus that causes COVID-19 in them.
- The CDC says you may get the vaccine when it becomes available to you. People with HIV may be more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19, so it is important to protect yourself whether you get a vaccine or not, by wearing a mask, staying at least 6 feet away from others, avoiding crowds and get-togethers and washing your hands often.
- We do not yet know if the vaccines will stop you from getting COVID-19. You may still get it but not have any symptoms so you could spread it to others. This is why it is important to wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet from others, avoid crowds and get-togethers and regularly wash your hands, even after getting vaccinated. We also don't know if people with HIV will have less of a response to the vaccines.
- Both vaccines are safe and work about the same. There is no information that one is better for people with HIV right now.

### Can I get a vaccine at my HIV clinic and how much will it cost?

- Vaccines are being given in a number of places. Some HIV clinics may be able to give the vaccine. Check with your HIV provider to find out.
- The government paid for the vaccines. Even if there is a charge from your provider for the visit, they must give you the vaccine for free. There are federal programs, including the Ryan White Program, that will cover these fees.

### Will I have more side effects because I have HIV?

- We do not yet know if people with HIV have different side effects.
- Most people will get some side effects a few days after getting the vaccine. These will last a few days. Your immune system protects your body from viruses and these side effects are from your immune system's reaction to the vaccine. That means that your body is doing exactly what we want it to do to build protection against COVID-19. These side effects may be stronger after the second shot or if you already have had COVID-19.
- Most people will have pain, swelling, or redness in the arm; other side effects could include feeling tired, having muscle and joint aches, having a headache, or having fever and chills. A small number of people had a serious allergic reaction to the vaccine within 15 minutes to half an hour of receiving it. That reaction can be treated immediately. That is why vaccine providers will ask you to stay for at least 15 minutes, to be watched after receiving the shot.
- If you have had a serious allergic reaction from a vaccine before, you should wait for at least 30 minutes.

### Will I need to stop my HIV medications to get the vaccine?

- You don't need to stop your medications to get the vaccine. It is important to keep taking your HIV medicines. Changing or stopping your HIV medications could put you at risk for getting sick from HIV and from COVID-19.
- HIV medicines do not stop you from getting COVID-19, and they are not being used to treat COVID-19.

### If my CD4 count is low, can I still get the vaccine?

- People with low CD4 counts may be at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. The CDC says that people with HIV with a low CD4 may get the vaccine when it's available.
- We do not know yet if the vaccine works as well in people with low CD4 counts. Your immune system, which fights off viruses, may not be able to protect you as well. If you get a vaccine it is important to still wear a mask, stay 6 feet away from others, avoid large crowds or get-togethers and wash your hands regularly.