Frequently Asked Questions
COVID-19 Vaccines

About COVID-19 Vaccines

Q: Is there a COVID-19 vaccine?
A: In the United States, two COVID-19 vaccines have been granted emergency use authorization (EUA) from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These vaccines, manufactured by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, began arriving in Ohio in December 2020.

Q: Why is a COVID-19 vaccine needed if social distancing and wearing masks prevent the COVID-19 virus from spreading?
A: Getting us through the pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines boost your immune system, so it will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Other steps, like masks and social distancing, help reduce your chance of being exposed to or spreading the virus. Together, the coming COVID-19 vaccines and proper prevention measures will offer the best protection from COVID-19.

Q: Are COVID-19 vaccines effective?
A: Yes. Evidence shows that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and work to prevent COVID-19. Of the first two vaccines to be granted FDA emergency use authorization, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was 95% effective and the Moderna vaccine was 94% effective in phase 3 clinical trials with more than 70,000 participants between the two studies. Although the COVID-19 vaccines have been developed recently, the technology used in mRNA vaccines, like those developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, has been studied for decades.

Q: I’ve seen a lot of rumors on social media about vaccines. How can I tell what is true?
A: The internet is rife with dangerous misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines, and it can be difficult to know what to trust. The best thing you can do is educate yourself about the vaccines with information from trustworthy sources. Learn more about finding credible vaccine information in this article from the CDC, and separate myths from facts on this page from the Ohio Department of Health.

Q: How many doses of COVID-19 vaccine will be needed? When is the second dose due?
A: Both the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the Moderna vaccine, which have been granted emergency use authorization, require two doses. Ohioans who receive a dose of a particular vaccine must receive a second dose of the vaccine from the same manufacturer, as they are not interchangeable. For example, if you receive a first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, your second dose must be the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine administered 21 days after the first dose. If you receive a first dose of the Moderna vaccine, your second dose must be the Moderna vaccine, administered 28 days after the first dose. These recommended intervals, with a standard four-day grace period, should be followed as closely as possible to receive full protection. If the intervals are exceeded, the second dose should be scheduled for administration up to 6 weeks (42 days) after the first dose, regardless of manufacturer. If the second dose is administered beyond these intervals, there is no need to restart the series, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance. There is a vaccine in development and Phase 3 clinical trials that uses one dose.

Q: If I already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine when it is available?
A: Yes, COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to you regardless of whether or not you already had COVID-19. You should not be required to have an antibody test before you are vaccinated. However, anyone currently infected with COVID-19 should wait to get vaccinated until after their illness has resolved and after they have met the criteria to discontinue isolation. The timing for each vaccination phase is limited, so if you have been released from the isolation period, and are in an eligible audience, you should consider getting a COVID-19 vaccine as vaccination clinics become available to you.
Q: Will the vaccine protect against the new COVID-19 variant now confirmed in the United States?
A: Viruses frequently change through mutation, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time. Multiple variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 have been documented in the United States and globally during this pandemic. Most variants do not change how the virus behaves, and many disappear. There is no evidence that these variants cause more severe illness or increased risk of death. Rapid spread of a new COVID-19 variant was first recognized in the United Kingdom in mid-December, and cases have been confirmed in the United States. According to the CDC, scientists are working to learn more about how easily this variant and other variants might spread, whether they could cause more severe illness, and whether currently authorized vaccines will protect people against them. Experts anticipate little to no impact on vaccine efficacy. Studies are pending to assess whether the immune response to infection with other variants or current vaccines will work effectively with this strain. Public health officials are also studying if variants are detected by currently available viral tests, and if they respond to medicines being used to treat COVID-19 patients.

The CDC’s recommendations for slowing the spread — wearing masks, staying at least 6 feet apart from others, avoiding crowds, ventilating indoor spaces, and washing hands often — will also help prevent the spread of this variant.

Q: Should I alter the FDA recommended dosing of COVID-19 vaccines in any way (such as taking only a single dose, having half doses administered, extending the length of time between doses, or mixing and matching COVID-19 vaccines)?
A: No. According to the FDA, at this time, suggesting changes to the authorized dosing or schedules of these vaccines is premature and not rooted solidly in the available evidence. Without appropriate data supporting such changes in vaccine administration, we run a significant risk of placing public health at risk, undermining the historic vaccination efforts to protect the population from COVID-19. Full doses should be administered as directed, the second dose should be from the same manufacturer as the first dose, and should follow the FDA-recommended intervals (21 days between doses for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and 28 days between doses for the Moderna vaccine). Read more here.

Q: Can other vaccines help prevent me from getting COVID-19?
A: Other vaccines, such as those for flu, measles, or other diseases, will not protect you from COVID-19. Only the vaccines designed specifically to protect you from COVID-19, once approved for use by the FDA, can prevent COVID-19. While a flu vaccine will not prevent you from getting COVID-19, it can prevent you from getting influenza (flu) at the same time as COVID-19. Because the flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will both be spreading during this time, getting a flu vaccine will be more crucial than ever.

Q: What is Operation Warp Speed?
A: Operation Warp Speed is a partnership between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense focused on helping to develop, produce, and distribute millions of vaccine doses for COVID-19 while ensuring that vaccines are safe and effective. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is focused on vaccine planning, working closely with the Ohio Department of Health and other state partners to prepare for vaccination availability.

Q: Who is paying for the COVID-19 vaccine?
A: If you choose to get a COVID-19 vaccine, you will not have to pay. Vaccine doses purchased with taxpayer dollars will be given to Ohioans who choose to receive them at no out-of-pocket cost. Vaccine providers will be able to charge an administration fee for giving the shot to someone. Providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient’s public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the federal Health Resources & Services Administration’s Provider Relief Fund.

Safety and Side Effects

Q: How will I know that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe?
A: The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible. Safety is a top priority while federal partners work to make a coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine(s) available. Clinical trials study the effectiveness of the vaccine in thousands of study participants. Data from these trials will be provided to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to determine vaccine safety and effectiveness. The FDA uses rigorous standards during the evaluation, and if it determines that a vaccine meets its safety and effectiveness requirements, it can make these available by approval or emergency use authorization. After the FDA decides, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) will review available data before making final vaccine recommendations to the CDC. There have been no shortcuts in the vaccine development process. The COVID-19 vaccine development process involved several steps comparable with those used to develop other vaccines, such as the flu or measles vaccine.
Q: What are normal side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?
A: When you get a COVID-19 vaccine, you can expect mild side effects, including soreness or redness at the injection site. Other common side effects are fever, chills, headache, tiredness, and muscle or joint pain. These side effects are normal as your body creates an immune response to protect you from COVID-19, and may increase with the second dose. Learn more about what to expect in this video from the CDC.

Q: Will there be enough vaccine for everyone in Ohio?
A: During the early phases of administration of COVID-19 vaccines in the United States, supply will be limited. This would mean that not everyone will be able to be vaccinated right away, but, in time, as vaccination production ramps up, every Ohioan who chooses may receive a vaccine as soon as large quantities are available.

Ohio’s Vaccine Distribution Plan and Eligibility

Q: Will Ohio make COVID-19 vaccination mandatory?
A: No. The vaccine will be available, as supplies allow, to all Ohioans who choose to receive the vaccine.

Q: How many vaccines are available?
A: Vaccine manufacturers are working hard to manufacture and distribute vaccines safely, quickly, and effectively. Each state will be informed, on a weekly basis, of how many vaccine doses they will receive that week.

For more information, visit: coronavirus.ohio.gov
Q: Are there special considerations on who will receive the COVID-19 first in Ohio?
A: At first, there will be a limited supply of COVID-19 vaccine, with a phased approach to offering the vaccines. However, it is important that the initial vaccines are given to people in a fair, ethical, and transparent way. Those who are at highest risk of contracting and transmitting the virus will be among the first to be vaccinated.

Q: Who can get the vaccine in Ohio?
A: Initially, there will be a limited number of vaccines available, and Ohio is committed to making it widely available for those that want to receive it, as quickly as possible, as shipments of vaccine arrive. In conjunction with the recommendations of medical experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), Ohio has identified who will be among the first to receive those very early shipments in Phase 1A, should they choose to be vaccinated, listed below.

- Healthcare workers and personnel who are routinely involved in the care of COVID-19 patients.
- Residents and staff in nursing homes.
- Residents and staff in assisted living facilities.
- Patients and staff at state psychiatric hospitals.
- People with developmental disabilities and those with mental health disorders, including substance use disorders, who live in group homes, residential facilities, or centers, and staff at those locations.
- Residents and staff at our two state-run homes for Ohio veterans.
- EMS responders.

The goals of Phase 1B are to save lives and to have students back in school full-time by March 1. This phase will specifically include:

- Ohioans, age 65 and up.
- Ohioans born with or who have early childhood conditions that are carried into adulthood, which put them at a higher risk for adverse outcomes due to COVID-19.
  - Sickle cell anemia.
  - Down syndrome.
  - Cystic fibrosis.
  - Muscular dystrophy.
  - Cerebral palsy.
  - Spina bifida.
  - People born with severe heart defects, requiring regular specialized medical care.
  - People with severe type 1 diabetes, who have been hospitalized for this in the past year.
  - Phenylketonuria (PKU), Tay-Sachs, and other rare, inherited metabolic disorders.
  - Epilepsy with continuing seizures; hydrocephaly; microcephaly, and other severe neurological disorders.
  - Turner syndrome, fragile X syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, and other severe genetic disorders.
  - People with severe asthma, who have been hospitalized for this in the past year.
  - Alpha and beta thalassemia
  - Solid organ transplant candidates and recipients.
- Adults/employees in all schools that want to go back, or to remain, educating in person.

The vaccine distribution plan for future priority populations are still under development and will be shared publicly as soon as they are finalized. As more information becomes available on who can receive the vaccine, and when they can receive the vaccine, we will communicate this information publicly through the news media and share information at coronavirus.ohio.gov/vaccine.

Q: If I am in an eligible audience, how will I know when I can get the vaccine during Phase 1A or 1B? Who do I call? How do I sign up?
A: During Phase 1A, the following providers were responsible for distributing vaccines to the following audiences:

- Essential workers in healthcare settings – hospitals, local health departments, and health systems.
- Long-term care/nursing home residents and staff – the federal pharmacy distribution program, administered by CVS, Walgreens, PharmScript, and Absolute Pharmacy.
- Congregate care staff and residents, EMS first responders, any remaining long-term care facility staff – local health departments.

Vaccinations in Phase 1B began the week of January 19. Governor DeWine announced a tiered system for offering vaccinations to the
estimated 2.2 million people who are eligible for the vaccine under this phase, beginning with those who are 80 or older. When a new age group begins, vaccinations may not be complete for the previous age group. It will take a number of weeks to distribute all of the vaccine given the limited doses available.

- Jan. 19, 2021 – Ohioans 80 years of age and older.
- Jan. 25, 2021 –
  - Ohioans 75 years of age and older
  - Those with a developmental or intellectual disability AND one of the medical conditions listed above and linked in the Phase 1B Medical Conditions sheet. If Ohioans feel they fit into this category, and have not been contacted about scheduling, they should follow-up with their local board of developmental disabilities.
    - Local boards of developmental disabilities will reach out to those they know qualify under this eligibility category to coordinate vaccinations. These boards will work with children’s hospitals and some local health departments on scheduling. Only those individuals in this population that work with their local developmental disabilities board will be eligible for vaccination at this time.
    - The vaccinations for Ohioans in this category will only be given at Local Health Departments or participating Children’s Hospitals in conjunction with the local boards of developmental disabilities. **Ohioans in this category should not go to their local pharmacies for scheduling or vaccination.**
- Feb. 1, 2021 – Ohioans 70 years of age and older; employees of K-12 schools that wish to remain or return to in-person or hybrid models.
- Feb. 8, 2021 – Ohioans 65 years of age and older.
- Feb. 15, 2021 – Ohioans born with or who have early childhood conditions that are carried into adulthood, which put them at a higher risk for adverse outcomes due to COVID-19, listed in the Phase 1B Medical Conditions sheet.
  - Ohioans with one of the above qualifying medical conditions may choose to receive the vaccine at the provider of their choice, but will be asked by their vaccine provider to verify that they are, in fact, eligible at this time.

Vaccine recipients must be age 16 or older to be eligible for the Pfizer vaccine, and age 18 or older to be eligible for the Moderna vaccine.

Ohioans should check the websites of their local health departments and EMAs to learn more about vaccinations in their community or to sign up to receive updates from the local health department. Groups defined by age will receive the vaccine from local health departments, hospitals, federally-qualified health centers, as well as some retail pharmacies. Providers for other audiences are yet to be announced. A statewide Vaccine Provider Locations search is available at vaccine.coronavirus.ohio.gov, allowing Ohioans to search by county and ZIP code to find a provider in their area to administer the vaccine.

**Q: I am not in one of the audiences that have been announced. When can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

**A:** Initially, there will be a limited number of vaccines available, so we are committed to making it widely available for those that want to receive it as quickly as possible as shipments of the COVID-19 vaccines arrive in Ohio. Ohio continues to make plans for a way to distribute vaccines in a way that is fair, ethical, and transparent, in conjunction with the recommendations of medical experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). As more information becomes available on who can receive the vaccine when we will communicate this information publicly, including through the news media, and share information at coronavirus.ohio.gov/vaccine.

**Q: When will the other distribution phases begin?**

**A:** As vaccine supply increases, Ohio will continue to vaccinate Ohioans who choose to receive the vaccine. The speed at which Ohio will move through the phases depends on the number of vaccines available.

**Q: Will my children be able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine?**

**A:** The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is currently recommended for patients age 16 and up, and the Moderna vaccine is currently recommended for patients age 18 and up. As more information becomes available on children and COVID-19 vaccines from the FDA, CDC, and vaccine manufacturers, it will be made available at coronavirus.ohio.gov/vaccine.
Q: What are acceptable forms of identification when I go to get my vaccine?
A: The vaccine provider will need identification to verify your identity, name, and age. You do not need to show proof of citizenship or residency status. Your identification will still be accepted if it is expired or from another state or country. You may need additional documentation to show that you are eligible to receive your vaccine (employee ID, paystub, etc.). Check with your provider to confirm what documentation you need for your appointment. Some acceptable forms of identification are listed below:

- Driver’s license or any photo ID, regardless of expiration date or place of origin.
- Active/retired military ID.
- Physician statement (including shot records).
- Census records.
- Adoption records.
- Naturalization certificate.
- Birth certificate: Birth record, either original or certified copy.
- Consulate ID or matricula consular.
- Passport or a passport card.
- Department of State forms.
  - Military service records (DD-214)
  - Certification of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States (FS-545)
  - Certification of Report of Birth Abroad of a United States Citizen (DS-1350)
  - Consular Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States of America (FS-240)
- Certificate of citizenship.
- Permanent resident card.
- Application for replacement naturalization/citizenship document.

Vaccine development

Q: How were COVID-19 vaccines developed so quickly?
A: The process has been quicker as a result of efforts to run concurrent trial phases, as well as a commitment to help condense timelines and reduce or eliminate months-long waiting periods during which documents would be prepared or be waiting for review. Messenger RNA (mRNA), used by the first two vaccines to receive FDA emergency use authorization (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna) is not unknown. Researchers have been studying mRNA for decades, and early-stage clinical trials using mRNA vaccines have been carried out for influenza, Zika, rabies, and cytomegalovirus (CMV). Recent technological advancements in RNA biology and chemistry, as well as delivery systems, have allowed these COVID-19 vaccines using mRNA to be developed as safe and effective vaccines. Additionally, because COVID-19 comes from a family of viruses, including the SARS coronavirus of 2002 and the MERS coronavirus of 2012, scientists had already researched how coronaviruses behaved and had begun development on a vaccine for MERS using a modified “spike protein.” Those years of research laid the groundwork for development of COVID-19 vaccines, which teach our bodies how to recognize COVID-19’s spike protein and create antibodies against it.

Q: What is the difference between an emergency use authorization (EUA) and an approval from the FDA?
A: An Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) authorizes the use of an unapproved medical product, or unapproved use of an approved medical product, for use during a public health emergency if the benefits of its use outweigh any known or potential risks. Both Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna’s COVID-19 vaccines have been granted EUA following rigorous review. In the past, EUAs have been issued for products, devices, and drugs related to Ebola, H1N1, Zika, and others. The EUAs are valid until the pandemic is over, the FDA revokes the EUAs, or the products are approved for traditional licensure by the FDA. The FDA closely monitors each vaccine for safety after the EUA is issued. Drug manufacturers are encouraged to obtain traditional FDA licensed vaccine approval as soon as possible.

Q: Were minorities or people with high-risk health conditions included in the clinical studies?
A: Yes. The Phase 3 clinical trials for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine (more than 43,000 participants) and Moderna vaccine (more than 30,000 participants) included communities that have historically been under-represented in clinical research and have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Approximately 42% of participants in Pfizer-BioNTech’s worldwide clinical trials, and 37% of the Moderna study population were from communities of color, which is similar to the diversity of the U.S. at large. In addition, the clinical studies included participants over age 65 (21% of Pfizer-BioNTech participants; 23% of Moderna participants); and those with high-risk chronic diseases that put them at increased risk of severe COVID-19, such as diabetes, severe obesity, and cardiac disease (46% of Pfizer-BioNTech participants; 42% of Moderna participants).

For more information, visit: coronavirus.ohio.gov
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For additional information, visit coronavirus.ohio.gov.
For answers to your COVID-19 questions, call 1-833-4-ASK-ODH (1-833-427-5634).

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. If you or a loved one are experiencing anxiety related to the coronavirus pandemic, help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call the COVID-19 CareLine at 1-800-720-9616.