Mayo Clinic answers questions about COVID-19 vaccine

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The COVID-19 vaccine is an important tool to help stop the ongoing pandemic, along with masking and physical distancing. Mayo Clinic's COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation and Distribution Workgroup have put together a list of questions and answers about the vaccine to help provide a better understanding of what you may expect.

Who should be vaccinated against COVID-19 infection?

Vaccination will be recommended for everyone, but supplies will be limited at first. Federal and state authorities call for health care personnel to be offered vaccine in the first phase of the program, starting with hospital workers, emergency responders and long-term care staff.

The initial priority will be to vaccinate health care personnel who are at high occupational risk for exposure to COVID-19 and those working in roles that are essential to the COVID-19 response. Mayo Clinic expects that the program will expand to all health care personnel soon, as well as patients at high risk of COVID-19 infection and complications.

Mayo Clinic will follow the guidance provided by federal and state authorities to prioritize groups for vaccinations. The guidelines have been developed by numerous national bodies, including the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine.

To develop a strategy for equitable allocation of limited vaccine supplies, these guidelines consider the risks of:

- Acquiring infection.
- Severe morbidity and mortality.
- Negative societal effects.
- Transmitting infection to others.

As availability improves, vaccines will be offered to all others in accordance to federal and state guidelines.

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

Early-phase studies of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine show that it is safe. However, about 15% of people developed transient local symptoms and half developed transient systemic reactions, primarily headache, chills, fatigue, muscle pain or fever. These transient reactions, which indicate a person's immune system is responding to the vaccine, resolved without complication or injury.

How effective is the COVID-19 vaccination?

Although phase 3 trial results are not available, experimental vaccine interim data indicate 90% efficacy after two doses. Efficacy is the measure of effectiveness obtained from a randomized controlled clinical trial. Further details regarding the effectiveness of the vaccine, such as how long the vaccination offers protection, are not yet available.

How many doses does COVID-19 vaccination require?

With the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, two doses are given 21 days apart. Most other COVID-19 vaccines that are expected over the next few months are anticipated to be given over two doses 28 days apart. So far, only one vaccine can be given as a single dose.

Will I have a choice of which vaccine I will get?

At this time, patients cannot choose which vaccine to receive. Given initial limited supplies, Mayo will distribute available vaccines to the highest risk groups based on guidance from Public Health Authorities.

How long will a COVID-19 vaccination offer protection?

At this time, the Moderna vaccine offers immunity of at least three months. For the other vaccines, it is not yet known how long COVID-19 vaccination will offer protection. Periodic boosters, such as with the

annual flu shot, may or may not be needed.

Aren't masking, social distancing and self-quarantining reasonable alternatives to COVID-19 vaccination?

Given the extent of COVID-19 spread in the U.S., masking, social distancing and self- quarantining will not be enough to contain the pandemic. Developing large-scale immunity in the community through vaccination is key to stopping the pandemic.

Everyone will need to continue to take precautions, such as masking and physical distancing, until the spread has stopped. Until then, COVID-19 spread can continue in the community from people who have or don't have symptoms.

A person can be contagious for as many as 14 days without symptoms. A person can develop symptoms but be contagious before symptoms start. Most [healthy adults](link) may be able to infect others, beginning two days before symptoms develop and up to 10 days after becoming sick.

Can those who have had COVID-19 get vaccinated for COVID-19?

Yes. Mayo Clinic recommends getting vaccinated for COVID-19, even in those who have had COVID-19 previously. However, those that had COVID-19 should delay vaccination until about 90 days from diagnosis. People should not get vaccinated if in quarantine after exposure or if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I got the flu vaccine?

Yes. Mayo Clinic recommends all its employees and patients get the flu vaccine and when it becomes available, the COVID-19 vaccine.

Will persons who get the vaccine still have to wear a face masks?

Yes. While the vaccine is highly effective at preventing symptomatic and severe disease, it is not 100% effective, and it is not yet known how well it prevents asymptomatic infection, or how long its effects will last. Everyone will need to continue taking precautions like masking and physical distancing until the spread has stopped.

I've heard that the COVID-19 vaccine is a live virus and many older people, as well as those with weakened immune systems are hesitant to get the vaccine because it could make them sick. Is that true?

There are many COVID-19 vaccines in development. The first vaccines Mayo Clinic will receive are not live virus vaccines. Some of the COVID-19 vaccines under development are live but others are not. Those who are immunocompromised should not get live vaccines. Mayo Clinic staff will ensure that those who are immunocompromised do not get a live vaccine.

The vaccines can be taken by people with weakened immunity like HIV patients or other immunosuppressed conditions. They may not get the same effective response as someone without immune compromise. Persons with recent bone marrow transplantation are advised to wait until after 6 months of bone marrow transplantation to allow their immune system to recover from it.

Can women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and children get the vaccines?At this time, vaccines are not being offered to women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and pediatric patients, due to lack of studies regarding efficacy and safety for these groups. It is recommended that you do not try and get pregnant for at least 60 days after the second dose of the vaccine.

Can a previously healthy older person get sick with COVID-19 after taking the vaccine? Do the benefits outweigh the risks in this population?

The vaccines are not 100% effective but they are far better than not getting vaccine. The benefits certainly outweigh the risks in healthy older persons. One cannot get COVID-19 infection from the initial COVID-19 vaccines Mayo Clinic will receive as they are inactivated vaccines and not live vaccines.

Can people with an egg allergy receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

Neither the Pfizer/BioNTech nor the Moderna Inc. vaccine contain egg.

The side effects for the COVID-19 vaccine are identical to the virus itself. If people are vaccinated and develop side effects, would they have to be tested for COVID- 19?Vaccine recipients will be provided with guidance on how to interpret side effects and what actions they should take following vaccination.

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