ALAMEDA HEALTH SYSTEM

COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: January 28, 2021

Are the Vaccines Safe and Effective?

Yes. Our top priority is the health and safety of our patients. The vaccines we'll distribute have been approved by the Federal Drug Administration and have been rigorously evaluated by experts and independent scientific reviewers to make sure they're safe and effective.

There are many protections in place to help ensure that COVID-19 vaccines will be safe. These include large, rigorous, multi-stage clinical trials and scientific review of these studies that determine if the vaccines work and are safe.

Vaccines can protect you from getting COVID-19, and most likely will prevent people from spreading the virus. Until this is verified, everyone needs to continue to wear a mask, wash their hands, and maintain six feet between them and others.

How were the vaccines developed so quickly?

All vaccines must meet US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) standards for quality, safety, and effectiveness before they are distributed to the public.

The FDA recognized that safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines were urgently needed to respond to the pandemic. The FDA committed its authority and expertise to speeding the development and distribution of vaccines.

COVID-19 vaccines were developed quickly because:

- Scientists were able to use existing research on new ways to develop vaccines.
- The pandemic's high infection rate allowed clinical trials to be completed much more quickly than usual.
- The US government provided funding to pharmaceutical companies allowing them to rapidly develop vaccines and build distribution systems.
- The FDA used an approval process called Emergency Use Authorization, which is faster than the usual approval process, but still requires rigorous clinical data on safety and efficacy.

Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. The vaccines cannot give you COVID-19.

Are there side effects to the vaccine?

The side effects reported from COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials include mild or moderate fatigue, headache, muscle aches, soreness or other injection site reactions, and mild fever. Side effects typically lasted a day or 2.

These side effects are similar to those for other vaccines, but happen more commonly, particularly after the second dose. Typically, when people have side effects after getting a vaccine, it's a sign that their body's immune response is working.

When will the vaccines be available?

Alameda Health System is following guidelines from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Alameda County Department of Public Health (ACDPH).

finalizing plans to vaccinate AHS patients who are 65 and older or essential workers. Those AHS patients will be contacted with more information on how they can access the vaccine or they can check alamedahealthsystem.org for more information.

You can visit the Alameda County Department of Public Health website at covid-19.acgov.org/vaccines to find out who they are vaccinating currently.

What vaccine is likely to be available?

Currently the FDA has approved the use of the COVID-19 vaccines developed by Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech.

The data submitted by Pfizer-BioNTech to the FDA shows that their vaccine is 95 percent effective at preventing COVID-19. The data submitted by Moderna to the FDA shows that their vaccine is 94.1 percent effective at preventing COVID-19.

To date AHS has received both vaccines to begin vaccinating its workforce and residents of long-term care facilities.

What do I need to know if I'm pregnant or breastfeeding?

Although none of the available COVID-19 vaccines have been tested in pregnant or breastfeeding patients, they work similarly to existing vaccines. These existing vaccines have been safely used for many years during pregnancy. If you are pregnant, considering becoming pregnant, or are breastfeeding, you are eligible for the vaccine.

Can my child get a COVID-19 vaccine?

No, none of the current vaccines are approved for children under 16 years of age.

How will I know if I can get the vaccine?

It's our goal to vaccinate everyone as quickly and safely as possible. We are finalizing plans to vaccinate AHS patients who are 65 and older or essential workers. Those AHS patients will be contacted with more information on how they can access the vaccine or they can check alamedahealthsystem.org for more information.

You may also talk with your primary care provider or check our website at alamedahealthsystem.org for updates.

Can I get on a waiting list?

We don't have a waiting list for vaccines and will distribute vaccines based on guidelines from ACPHD and as vaccine supply allows.

How long will the protection from the vaccine last?

Researchers don't yet know how long COVID-19 vaccine protection will last. Ongoing results from clinical trial participants will be used to further understand the vaccine.

How many doses of the vaccine will I need?

The vaccines we have received require 2 doses, given several weeks apart. It's critical to get both doses to get full protection from COVID-19. The first dose primes the immune system and helps it recognize the virus. The second shot strengthens the immune response.

It's important that both doses are of the same vaccine type. Different types of vaccines aren't interchangeable. We'll track which vaccine you receive to ensure that you get the right shots at the right times.

Will I still need to wear a mask after getting vaccinated?

Yes. It's very important for you to wear a mask, follow social distancing guidelines, and wash your hands often.

Further research is needed to confirm whether COVID-19 vaccines will prevent people from spreading the virus. Until this is known, everyone needs to continue following safety guidelines.

How quickly could the vaccine end the pandemic?

COVID-19 vaccines will play a critical role in combating the pandemic. Their impact in ending the pandemic will depend on how effective they are against the virus, how quickly vaccine supplies can be manufactured and delivered and how many people get vaccinated.

Even as vaccines become available, it will be important to continue to wear masks, maintain social distancing, and clean hands often to reduce the spread of illness.

What is an mRNA vaccine?

mRNA (messenger RNA) vaccines are a new type of vaccine that can provide protection from infectious diseases. mRNA teaches cells to make specific proteins that stimulate the immune system to create antibodies to a virus. This keeps us from getting ill.

Many existing vaccines instead use a weakened or dead virus to trigger an immune response.

Though it sounds similar to DNA, mRNA doesn't affect or interact with DNA. In fact, cells break down and get rid of mRNA after it does its job.

For more information about mRNA vaccines, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.