

COVID-19 Vaccines: Frequently Asked Questions

Vaccination is one of the most important tools to end the COVID-19 pandemic. See below for answers to common questions about the vaccines, including information on COVID-19 vaccines for youth.

1. Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.

Millions of people in the United States (U.S.) have received COVID-19 vaccines under the most intense safety monitoring in U.S. history. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends you get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you are eligible. If you have a history of allergic reactions to vaccines, ask your doctor to help you decide about the COVID-19 vaccine.

2. How were COVID-19 vaccines developed so quickly?

Vaccine makers had the resources they needed very quickly.

The global health community came together to fight this pandemic. Early funding was given to vaccine makers, which helped scientists transform years of research into safe and effective vaccines. They shared data as they worked. They used new technologies. All of these factors helped scientists to quickly produce a safe and effective vaccine. To view a timeline of the COVID-19 vaccine development, [click here](#).

3. How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

The vaccines teach your body to recognize COVID-19, so it is prepared to fight it.

The Pfizer-BioNTech™ (Pfizer™) and Moderna™ vaccines are [messenger RNA vaccines \(mRNA\)](#). mRNA provides the instructions your body needs to build a small protein that looks like a piece of COVID-19. This helps your body recognize the virus if you become infected. This protects you and helps kill the virus before you can spread it to others. [Viral vector vaccines](#), like Janssen™, provide instructions to build the spike protein found on the surface of COVID-19. This type of vaccine uses a harmless strand of another virus to deliver the instructions.

4. How do I find out if I am eligible?

Check the COVID-19 vaccine webpage: coronavirus-sd.com/vaccine.

As of November 4, 2021, everyone 5 years old and above is now eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals younger than 18 can only receive the Pfizer™ COVID-19 vaccine. Check the [vaccine webpage](#) for the latest information.

5. How much do COVID-19 vaccinations cost?

COVID-19 vaccines are provided at no cost.

Check first to see if you can receive the vaccine from the provider you normally go to. If they are not offering it, or if you do not have a regular provider, the County can provide the vaccine. You can drop in or schedule a vaccination through the County website. Insurance is not required to receive the vaccine, and vaccines are provided at no cost.

6. If I already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need the vaccine?

Yes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends you get vaccinated, even if you had COVID-19.

The CDC recommends vaccination even if you have recovered from COVID-19 infection because we do not know how long immunity lasts. While there is no suggested minimum time frame between infection and vaccination, current evidence suggests that the risk of getting infected again is low in the months after initial infection, but may increase with time due to decreasing immunity.

7. Do I still have to wear a mask in public after I receive the vaccine?

You should follow all COVID-19 public health safety recommendations.

Vaccines provide strong protection against infection. It is recommended that fully vaccinated and unvaccinated people continue to wear a mask indoors in public settings to maximize protection. Face coverings are required for everyone in certain settings, regardless of vaccination status. These settings include public transportation, indoors in K-12 schools, childcare and other youth settings, adult and senior care facilities, healthcare settings, detention facilities, homeless and emergency shelters.

8. What is herd immunity? How many people does it take to achieve it?

When enough people become immune to a disease, it makes its spread less likely.

Vaccines are our best tool to help protect people from disease. The vaccines teach our bodies how to fight off diseases, such as COVID-19. The more people who are vaccinated, the more our community is protected, even those who are not immune themselves. This community-wide protection is herd or community immunity. Herd immunity varies from disease to disease. We do not know yet exactly how many people will need the vaccine to build herd immunity from COVID-19. It may vary depending on the type of variants in circulation. This is why it is important to vaccinate as many as possible and follow all safety measures to slow the spread and not allow the virus to form new variants.

9. I never get sick. Why do I need the vaccine?

People can appear healthy and still carry the COVID-19 virus and spread it to others.

If you never get an infection, you cannot accidentally spread it to family, friends, classmates, or co-workers. Vaccination helps your body fight the virus, making you much less likely to get COVID-19 and spread it to others. Vaccination helps protect people who cannot get the vaccine, including infants, young children, and individuals with a chronic disease who are at risk for complications from the virus. Additionally, vaccines are not approved yet for children less than 5 years of age. Ending this pandemic takes a community effort.

10. Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for pregnant women?

Many pregnant women have safely received the vaccine.

The CDC strongly recommends COVID-19 vaccination for people who are pregnant, recently pregnant, breastfeeding, trying to become pregnant now, or might become pregnant in the future. Evidence about the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy, although limited, has been growing. The [CDC continues to monitor the data](#), and no safety concerns have been noted to either the pregnant women or the fetus. Pregnant women may want to consult with their healthcare providers about the COVID-19 vaccine. While such a conversation might be helpful, it is not required before vaccination. Pregnant women can receive a COVID-19 vaccine without any additional documentation from their healthcare provider.

11. Can children receive the vaccine?

Yes. Individuals 5 years and older are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

The Pfizer™ COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for people 5 years and older. COVID-19 vaccines for children ages 5-11 years old are subject to the very same [multi-step evaluation and approval process](#) as all other COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 vaccines, including those routinely recommended for childhood vaccination. Over two thousand participants ages 5-11 years old participated in the Pfizer™ pivotal clinical trial. The results showed a strong immune response one month after the second dose. These findings are similar to results of a previous clinical trial demonstrating a strong immune response reported in 12-15-year-olds compared to 16-25-year-olds. Clinical trials are currently in progress for children 6 months to 4 years of age. Soon, we will learn much more. The COVID-19 vaccines from Moderna™ and Janssen™ are only approved for people 18 years and older.

12. Do minors need consent from parents or legal guardians?

Yes. Eligible minors need consent from their parent or legal guardian to be vaccinated.

Consent must be provided in person by the parent/guardian at the vaccination site, OR a parent/guardian can provide their consent in advance by completing a [consent form](#). [Check the website](#) for the latest information.

13. Do minors need to show proof of eligibility to be vaccinated?

Items required at the time of vaccination depend on a person's age. For minors (5-17 years old), requirements will vary based on whether or not an adult (18 years and older) will be present when they receive the vaccine.

- All eligible minors may visit a vaccination site without an appointment and without bringing any documentation (photo ID and proof of age) IF a parent, legal guardian, or a relative caregiver is with them at the site.
- If a minor will not have an adult present with them at the vaccination site, an appointment needs to be made AND their parent or legal guardian will need to complete the [Consent Form for Minors](#) to provide their consent in advance. Parental consent is required for all eligible minors to be vaccinated.

Caregiver Affidavit Form [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

Consent Form for Minors - Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

Fact Sheet for Recipients and Caregivers [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

14. Why should my child get a vaccine if COVID-19 does not affect them as much?

Children can appear healthy and still carry the COVID-19 virus and spread it to others.

While children infected with COVID-19 are less likely to develop severe illness compared with adults, children are still at risk of complications from COVID-19 and developing severe illness. The number and rate of cases among children in the U.S. has increased since the onset of the pandemic. As of October 2021, about 26% of all COVID-19 cases in San Diego County have been among individuals 0-17 years old. Becoming vaccinated helps your body fight the virus, so you are less likely to spread it to others, even if you get infected. Youths that do not get that sick from COVID-19 infection can still suffer from [long haul COVID-19](#) (symptoms that last weeks or months after first being infected), as well as multisystem inflammatory syndrome, although very rare.

15. Can schools require COVID-19 vaccines for students?

Yes. The State of California also plans to require that schools mandate students to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

California is the first state to announce plans to require student COVID-19 vaccinations for in-person learning when the vaccine receives full approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for private or public elementary or secondary schools. Students will be required to be vaccinated for in-person learning starting the term following FDA full approval of the vaccine for their grade span (7-12 and K-6). The COVID-19 vaccine requirement will take effect for students between the ages 5-11 corresponding to grades K-6 at the start of the term, following full approval for students of ages 12 and over. Students under the age of full approval, but within the grade span, will be required to be vaccinated once they reach the age of full approval. Schools can create policies that are stricter than the guidance if they choose. For more information about the State's plan, visit [CA.gov](https://www.ca.gov).

16. Should I get a booster dose of the vaccine?

Boosters are recommended for specific groups of people.

A [booster dose](#) of Pfizer™ or Moderna™ six months after the second dose or 2 months after the initial Janssen™ dose is recommended by the CDC for ages 65+, certain high-risk groups, and other age ranges where COVID-19 exposure or severe disease is more likely. A booster dose is needed to maintain longer protection since one's immunity to COVID-19 may wane over time.

Mix and Match: Individuals may receive a booster dose of any of the available COVID-19 vaccines following completion of primary vaccination of a different COVID-19 vaccine. The CDC recommendations now allow for this type of mix and match dosing for booster shots. For more information on who is eligible in San Diego County, visit the [COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility website](#).

17. If you have a medical condition, can you get the vaccine?

People with most medical conditions can receive COVID-19 vaccines.

Some individuals with certain pre-existing conditions are at a higher risk of severe illness if they get the coronavirus. Receiving the vaccine is almost always less of a health risk than getting COVID-19. If you have a concern about risks, consult with your doctor.

18. Are there side effects?

When you are vaccinated, there are some mild side effects that go away in a day or two. Side effects are a sign that the vaccine is working.

Side effects could include:

- Your arm may be sore where you received the shot. You can apply a cool, wet washcloth to reduce pain.
- You may also experience mild flu symptoms, like chills, headache, or fever. You can drink plenty of fluids and dress lightly. Rest will also help your body recover.

If your side effects worry you or do not seem to be going away, consult with your doctor.

19. Is it possible to be allergic to the vaccine?

Allergic reactions are extremely rare, but they are possible. After you receive the vaccine, you will stay at the vaccination site for a brief time in case you have an immediate reaction.

- People with a history of severe allergic reactions or who meet other criteria will be monitored for at least 30 minutes.
- All other people will be monitored for at least 15 minutes after getting the vaccine.

You will be told to pay attention to signs of an allergic reaction such as a swollen tongue or throat or difficulty breathing during this time. Vaccination providers will have medications and equipment on-site to treat reactions. Treatments can include epinephrine, antihistamines, stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, and timing devices to check your pulse.

20. Who are the best sources of information if I have more questions?

Your healthcare provider team is the best source to address questions you have about the vaccine and your own health risks.

You may hear different ideas about the vaccine in the community and on social media. It is natural to turn to close friends and family when we have concerns. However, it is best to ask a health care professional if you have questions, so you are getting answers based on evidence. You can learn about types of incorrect information, accessing credible sources, claims and facts, and frequently asked questions on the County of San Diego [Evaluating COVID-19 Information](#) webpage. You can also go to trusted sources, such as the [County of San Diego](#), the [California Department of Public Health](#), or the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Updates to guidance and information are made on all of these web resources as they become available.