BALTIMORE CITY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs for Senior Housing Residents

INTERNATIONAL VACCINE ACCESS CENTER

JOHNS HOPKINS BLOOMBERG SCHOOL of PUBLIC HEALTH

HOW DOES THE COVID-19 VACCINE WORK?

What is a vaccine?

A vaccine helps your body make antibodies to fight a specific virus. Your body makes antibodies to fight common germs, such as your cold last winter. Since COVID-19 is new, we all need vaccines to help our bodies build antibodies that target the virus so that when you are exposed to COVID-19, your antibodies will fight the virus. This will protect you from getting sick or getting very sick from COVID-19. **The COVID-19 vaccine does not have any live virus in it and make you sick with COVID-19.**

Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccine will keep most people from getting sick with COVID-19. The virus can cause severe medical issues, especially for people who have other medical problems. COVID-19 can also lead to death. The vaccine helps prevent getting very sick from the virus and may also help people to not spread the virus to others.

If I get vaccinated, will it help to protect others?

Getting the vaccine is a community service. In the long run, getting vaccinated will help to protect your community.

We still do not know how well the vaccine will prevent the spread of COVID-19. For now, after you get the vaccine, we all must still keep wearing masks and stay at least 6 feet away from others (social distancing). Even with the vaccine, you can still be exposed to the virus. The virus can stay in your nose and mouth for some time. Although you may not get sick, you might be spreading the virus to others.

When enough people have the vaccines, the virus cannot easily spread and infect people. That's when the community will have "herd immunity" and be protected.

Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I'm social distancing?

Wearing masks and social distancing helps to reduce your chance of being exposed to or spreading the COVID-19 virus. But, in order to stop the spread of the virus, you need to also get vaccinated in order to make your body ready to fight the virus if you are exposed.

Will an influenza (flu) vaccine protect me from COVID-19?

No. Getting the flu shot will not protect you against COVID-19, but **getting the flu shot protects you from getting the flu and/or reduces how sick you get and if you would need to go to the hospital because of being sick.**

SAFETY CONCERNS

Does the COVID-19 vaccine have the COVID-19 virus in it? Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. The vaccine does not have the COVID-19 virus in it. The vaccines are made from mRNA, a molecule that tells your body how to make antibodies to fight COVID-19. **The vaccine CANNOT make you sick with COVID-19.**

How could the vaccine be made so quickly and still be safe?

COVID-19 is a global emergency. Scientists, drug companies, and governments all worked together to develop a vaccine as fast and as safe as possible. Scientists got extra funding to develop the vaccine but did not skip the steps to make a safe and effective vaccine. **The COVID-19 vaccines have gone through the same testing and safety checks as other vaccines.** To be approved, all vaccines must be rigorously tested on several thousand people and COVID-19 vaccines had several thousand people in their trials.

How do I know the COVID-19 vaccine is safe for the long term?

The drug companies will keep checking on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines. To do this, they will check on how well people do with the vaccine. When you get your vaccine, you can sign up for a smartphone app called "V-SAFE" that lets you record any side effects and sends reminders for your second dose. If there is any serious problem, the CDC would call you to make sure you get the care you need. You can also call your doctor at any time if you have any concerns.

Can I get vaccinated if I'm allergic to eggs or unable to get the flu vaccine?

Yes. Even if you have had severe reactions to vaccines or other injections in the past, you can still get the COVID-vaccine. But the CDC recommends that you discuss the risks with your doctors before getting vaccinated.

You can also have the vaccine even if you have a history of anaphylactic shock. Make sure to share your medical history with the person giving you the vaccine. If you have a severe allergic reaction after leaving the COVID-19 vaccination site, please call 911 right away.

If you are allergic to polysorbate (PEG), an ingredient in the vaccine, you should not get the vaccine.

When you get the vaccine, medical staff will watch you for the next 15 minutes to make sure you are okay. Reactions are very rare but if you have a reaction, they will treat you right away.

As of January 2021, the United States has given almost 3 million COVID-19 vaccine shots. **Only 10 people** out of 3 million shots have had a severe allergic reaction and they are now all fine. This means there is **only 0.000005% chance** that you will develop a severe allergic reaction. Learn more about COVID-19 vaccines and allergies.

Can I get vaccinated if I have a serious medical problem ("comorbidity") like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, kidney disease, or chronic lung disease?

Yes. You can and should get your COVID-19 vaccine if you have a comorbidity. Medical problems such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, kidney disease, and chronic lung disease can increase your risk of getting very sick or even dying if you get COVID-19. If you have any of these conditions, please get the vaccine as soon as you can.

In the U.S., about 80% of COVID-19 deaths have been people age 65 and older. Risks are even higher for older people with other medical problems. Many senior housing home residents have a high risk of getting very sick with COVID-19 because of the extra risk because COVID-19 can spread quickly between people who live near each other.

While testing the vaccines, experts looked at how well the vaccines work in people with these health conditions. They found that the vaccine protected people with these health conditions just as well as people without these conditions. Learn more about vaccination considerations for persons with underlying medical conditions.

Do I need to get vaccinated if I already had COVID-19?

Yes. You may get some protection you get from having an infection, called natural immunity. But since COVID-19 is a new virus, we do not know how long your natural immunity will last or how strong it will be. We also don't yet know how long the protection you get from a COVID-vaccine will last. Experts are studying both natural immunity and vaccine-induced immunity.

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER GETTING VACCINATED?

What are the potential short-term side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. **Most side effects are mild and go away in a day or two.** While some people don't have any side effects, most people may feel a little unwell after getting the vaccine because their immune system is responding. This is called an "immune response" and it shows that the vaccine is working as your body builds protection against the virus. **This does not mean that you have COVID-19. The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19.**

The most common side effects are pain at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain and chills. Don't worry if your arm starts to hurt the next day – this pain is normal and it usually goes away after a day or two. You can take Tylenol or Advil to treat these side effects. Remember that the vaccine's side effects are much less life-threatening than getting sick with COVID-19. Many people said they felt some ***mild*** side effects more after the second dose of the vaccine. Older adults have fewer side effects than younger adults.

Solutions for possible side effects from getting the vaccine:

To help reduce pain or discomfort from where you got the shot-

- Apply a clean, cool, wet washcloth over the area.
- Use or exercise your arm.
- Take a pain reliever, like Advil or Tylenol.

To reduce discomfort from fever-

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Take medicine to reduce fever, like Advil or Tylenol.

When to contact your doctor or healthcare provider-

- If the redness or tenderness where you got the shot increases after 24 hours.
- If the side effects are really bad or do not go away after a few days.

If I get the vaccine, do I still have to wear a mask and practice social distancing?

Yes. **We are still learning about how the COVID-19 vaccine protects people so we all must still keep covering our mouths and noses with masks, washing hands often, and staying at least 6-feet away from others.** Get the vaccination and keep following CDC recommendations.

I was already vaccinated; do I still need to isolate or quarantine if I am exposed or have symptoms of COVID-19?

Yes. Even if you get the COVID-19 vaccine, the CDC recommends you keep following their guidance for quarantine and isolation if you are exposed to COVID-19 or have symptoms. The CDC is closely following scientists and will update their recommendations if needed.

Do I need to get both doses of the vaccine or am I protected from COVID-19 after getting 1 dose?

Yes, you need to get both shots to get the full protection from COVID-19. It usually takes a week or two for your immunity to build up after getting the vaccine. The current COVID-19 vaccines in the US require 2 shots. The first shot starts to build protection against the virus and then the second shot, given a few weeks later, is needed to get the full protection.

- Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine doses should be given 3 weeks (21 days) apart.
- Moderna vaccine doses should be given 1 month (28 days) apart.

It is important to get your second vaccine shot as close to the time required (21 or 28 day) as possible. You can get your second shot later, but it's not recommended to get it earlier.

When you get your first shot, you can schedule your second shot while you are at the vaccination site.

A third vaccine from Johnson & Johnson (J&J) may soon be available as a single dose.

How long will I be protected after getting vaccinated?

We are still learning about how long antibodies last after a COVID-19 infection or if the antibodies will protect you from getting infected again. As scientists keep studying what happens with vaccine trials and regular vaccination, we will know more.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine work against the new variants of the virus?

Yes. From what we are learning, **the vaccine seems to work in fighting the variant strains of COVID-19.** Researchers are watching new strains closely to decide if any changes need to be made to the vaccine. We still need to get as many people vaccinated as soon as possible to lower the impact of COVID-19 on our community.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE VACCINE

Where can I get vaccinated?

There are many places you can go to get vaccinated, including:

- Large community clinics
- Mobile/targeted clinics
- Drive-through clinics
- Pharmacies
- Private and public healthcare providers

You are a high priority! As an adult living in a senior housing building, you a high priority group to get your COVID-19 vaccine. You will be able to receive your vaccine in the same way that you get your flu shot; through your doctor or pharmacy, especially once vaccines become more available. Your options for getting your vaccine may be different based on where you live. To learn more about what's happening with vaccines in your community, check with your local health department, resident service coordinator, or community healthcare worker.

When can I get vaccinated?

Due to the limited supply of COVID-19 vaccines in the US at this time, not everyone can get their vaccine right away. However, as an older adult, you are a high priority due to a higher risk of severe illness from the COVID-19 virus. **Older adults are getting their vaccines now.**

If you are aged 65 or older, you can schedule your vaccine by:

- Calling your doctor's office, or
- Filling out this interest form to pre-register
- Calling 410-396-CARE (2273)

What is the difference between the vaccines?

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are the only ones approved for use in the US right now. A new single dose vaccine from J&J may soon be available. **All of these vaccines will protect you against the severe effects of COVID-19 and are safe and effective for older adults of all races and ethnicities as well as those with other medical problems.** You should take whichever vaccine you are offered.

Can you mix and match vaccines from different manufacturers?

No. You should get the same vaccine for both shots. Your first and second dose should be from the same vaccine.

RESOURCES

Where can I get vaccinated?

- University of Maryland Medical System: COVID-19 Vaccine Request Form for University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS) Patients
- MedStar Health: https://covidvaccine.medstarhealth.org/vaccine-form
- Luminis Health (Anne Arundel Medical Center): https://askaamc.formstack.com/forms/community_vaccination
- Frederick Health Medical Group: FrederickHealth.org/COVIDVaccine
- Baltimore County: COVID-19 vaccine registration form: Baltimore County Department of Health Vaccine Registry
- Baltimore City: Older adults aged 65+complete the vaccine interest form online or call Maryland Access Point at 410-396-CARE (2273) to help register for the vaccine
- For all Maryland locations to get the vaccine: coronavirus.maryland.gov and click on "Find a Vaccine"

Where can I find out more about the COVID-19 vaccine?

- The Center for Disease Control (CDC): COVID-19 Vaccines
- The International Vaccine Access Center (IVAC): COVID-19 Resources
- Maryland's COVID Distribution: COVIDLINK
- Baltimore City Health Department: Baltimore City Health Department
- State of Maryland: COVID-19 vaccination plan
- Maryland Department of Health: COVID Vaccine FAQs

Where can I get more information related to COVID-19 and Senior Living Facilities?

- Coursera: Strategies for Assisted Living Communities during COVID-19
- Coursera: Strategies for Senior Housing Communities during COVID-19