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Healthcare Management Support Systems

INFECTION PREVENTION CONNECTION

Quick Answers to Common Questions About COVID-19 Vaccines

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based on information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

How do COVID vaccines work?

COVID-19 vaccines help our bodies develop immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19 without us having to get the illness. With all types of vaccines, the body is left with a supply of “memory” T-lymphocytes as well as B-lymphocytes that will remember how to fight that virus in the future.

It typically takes a few weeks for the body to produce T-lymphocytes and B-lymphocytes after vaccination. Therefore, it is possible that a person could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination and then get sick because the vaccine did not have enough time to provide protection.

Sometimes after vaccination, the process of building immunity can cause symptoms, such as fever. These symptoms are normal and are a sign that the body is building immunity.

How do we know if COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ensures the safety, effectiveness, and availability of vaccines for the United States. Before the FDA licenses (approves) a vaccine, the vaccine is tested extensively by its manufacturer. FDA scientists and medical professionals carefully evaluate all the available information about the vaccine to determine its safety and effectiveness.

CDC will further assess the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines after they are approved or authorized for emergency use by FDA and recommended for public use. These real-world assessments will compare groups of people who do and don’t get vaccinated and people who do and don’t get COVID-19 to assess how well COVID-19 vaccines are working to protect people.

Results from monitoring efforts are reassuring. Some people have no side effects. Many people have reported mild side effects after COVID-19 vaccination, like:

- pain or swelling at the injection site,
- a headache, chills,
- or fever.

These reactions are common. A small number of people have had a severe allergic reaction (called “anaphylaxis”) after vaccination, but this is extremely rare. If this occurs, vaccination providers have medicines available to effectively and immediately treat the reaction.

What are the current authorized and recommended COVID-19 vaccines?

Messenger RNA vaccines—also called mRNA vaccines—are some of the first COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the United States.

- mRNA vaccines do not use the live virus that causes COVID-19. They cannot give someone COVID-19.
- They no not affect or interact with our DNA in any way. mRNA never enters the nucleus of the cell, which is where our DNA (genetic material) is kept.
- The cell breaks down and gets rid of the mRNA soon after it is finished using the instructions.

Currently, two vaccines are authorized and recommended to prevent COVID-19:

- Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine
- Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine

As of December 28, 2020, large-scale (Phase 3) clinical trials are in progress or being planned for three COVID-19 vaccines in the United States:

- AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine
- Janssen's COVID-19 vaccine
- Novavax's COVID-19 vaccine

Experts continue to conduct more studies about the effect of COVID-19 vaccination on severity of illness from COVID-19, as well as its ability to keep people from spreading the virus that causes COVID-19.

Can a COVID-19 vaccine be given to persons with a history of COVID-19?

Yes. Due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19 and the fact that reinfection with COVID-19 is possible, you should be vaccinated regardless of whether you already had COVID-19 infection. If you were treated for COVID-19 symptoms with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma, you should wait 90 days before getting a COVID-19 vaccine. Talk to your doctor if you are unsure what treatments you received or if you have more questions about getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

How many doses of COVID-19 vaccine are needed?

Nearly all COVID-19 vaccines being studied in the U.S. require two doses. The first shot starts building protection, but a second dose is still needed to get the best protection the vaccine can offer. You should **get your second shot as close to the recommended 3-week or 1-month interval as possible.** However, there is no maximum interval between the first and second doses for either vaccine. You should not get the second dose earlier than the recommended interval. After you get both doses of COVID-19 vaccine, it takes your body about 2 weeks to build immunity. It is possible you could catch COVID-19 disease before your body has built immunity from the vaccine.

Can pregnant people be vaccinated?

Yes. A pregnant person who is part of a group recommended to receive COVID-19 vaccine (e.g., healthcare personnel) may choose to be vaccinated. There are currently few data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnant or lactating people. When making a decision, you and your patient should consider the:

- level of COVID-19 community transmission
- patient's personal risk of contracting COVID-19
- risks of COVID-19 to the patient and potential risks to the fetus
- efficacy of the vaccine
- side effects of the vaccine
- lack of data about the vaccine during pregnancy

Can children get vaccinated for COVID-19?

Not yet. Studies are now underway with COVID-19 vaccines that can be recommended for children younger than age 16.

Is it safe to get a COVID-19 vaccine if a person has allergies?

For most people with allergies, yes. However, if you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in a COVID-19 vaccine, you should not get that vaccine or any COVID-19 vaccine. For more information about vaccines and allergies visit: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/allergic-reaction.html

Do the COVID-19 vaccines interfere with TB test results?

According to the Vaccine Recommendations and Guidelines of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), inactive vaccines do not interfere with TB test results. Although the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine is not a live virus vaccine, not enough is yet known of the potential impact of mRNA vaccines on immune responses to say conclusively whether the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine could have a potential effect on TST or IGRA test results during the first 4 weeks after COVID-19 vaccination.

For healthcare personnel or patients who require baseline TB testing (at onboarding or entry into facilities) at the same time they are to receive a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine, CDC recommends:

- Perform TB symptom screening on all healthcare personnel or patients.
- If using IGRA, draw blood prior to COVID-19 mRNA vaccination.
- If using TST, place prior to COVID-19 mRNA vaccination.
- If COVID-19 mRNA vaccination has already occurred, defer TST or IGRA until 4 weeks after completion of 2-dose COVID-19 mRNA vaccination.

Bottom Line: Help protect yourself and others by getting vaccinated

COVID-19 vaccination and following CDC recommendations on wearing masks and social distancing are the best ways to protect against COVID-19 illness. CDC recommends you get vaccinated for COVID-19 as soon as you are eligible.

Steven Hirsch & Associates can assist you with evaluating and monitoring your infection control policies, procedures and processes. Click here to learn more.

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