

Basic facts about COVID vaccines and vaccination

- Widespread vaccination is an essential part of bringing about a rapid end to the COVID-19 pandemic. Getting vaccinated when it is our turn is an important way to protect our own health and that of our families and communities so that we can save lives, rebuild the economy and safely participate together in the activities we enjoy.
- Development and approval of the new COVID-19 vaccines was fast, but no shortcuts were taken. COVID-19 vaccines went through all of the standard steps for testing and approval. The process was much faster than usual because the COVID-19 pandemic is a national and global priority.
- COVID-19 vaccines have already been tested in tens of thousands of people. Although COVID-19 vaccines are new, this *type* of vaccine (mRNA vaccine) has been researched and used for 3 decades. That is why scientists were able to develop the COVID-19 vaccines so quickly.
- COVID-19 vaccines have been demonstrated to be safe, with only some short-term side-effects. There have been a few cases of serious allergic reactions, which have been quickly treated. (Allergic reactions can happen with any vaccine, and a number of drugs, such as penicillin.) While a serious side effect from a COVID 19 vaccine is a “maybe” that we have not yet seen, we know for sure that COVID 19 is a serious disease with potential long-term health consequences.
- Negative side effects or adverse events from vaccines generally occur within hours or days (not months or years), so at this point, we can be pretty confident that we will not see new serious negative health effects from the COVID-19 vaccines in the distant future.
- Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have been proven to prevent COVID symptoms; we do not yet know whether they prevent infection and transmission. The vaccines prevent you from getting sick, but we don’t know yet whether they keep you from being infected and able to pass it on to someone else. We should know the answer to that soon, but it is important for everyone to keep wearing masks, washing hands and physical distancing even if they have been vaccinated.
- The current COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective, but there will still be a few people (about 5 per 100 people) for whom they do not work. It is important to continue all of the other prevention measures such as wearing masks, washing hands and physical distancing even if after you have been vaccinated.
- mRNA vaccines are not manufactured using eggs the way that some vaccines are, so if you are allergic to eggs it is still safe for you to be vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine.
- mRNA vaccines teach the body to produce an immune response to SARS-CoV-2 and then the body breaks down and eliminates the RNA, and does this without affecting the person's DNA

- People will be vaccinated in the order of how much risk they face. The first group includes health care workers and the elderly. The general population who are not facing higher risks will probably be vaccinated by the end of the summer months. As we get closer, you will be alerted through your doctor, community health workers, and public information. You will not need to pay any money to be vaccinated.

Tips for talking with communities about vaccination

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted lives and communities in the U.S. and across the world. Widespread vaccination is an essential part of bringing a rapid end to the pandemic, along with continuing to wear masks, washing hands, maintaining physical distance, and minimizing contact with people outside your household.

Many people have questions about vaccines in general, and about COVID-19 vaccines in particular. The COVID-19 vaccines are new, and it is understandable that people are looking for more information about them. Unfortunately, much of what they may find on the internet or hear from their family and friends is not correct, so people may be hearing or reading rumors, myths, or even deliberate disinformation. It is important that healthcare providers and public health advocates provide their patients and communities with accurate information about vaccines and vaccination at every opportunity.

Because vaccines have been the target of so much misinformation, we know a lot about how best to counteract it with accurate, scientific information. Here are some basic guidelines for what works and what doesn't to help people learn more about vaccines and make fact-based decisions about vaccination for themselves and their families.

What works to counteract vaccine misinformation and promote vaccination:

- Listening to people with respect and understanding, and not making them feel stupid or ridiculed for their beliefs. Remember that everyone is trying to make the best decision for their own health and that of their families.
- People need to hear information multiple times before they really believe it, especially if it is different from what they thought was true. Be prepared to provide the same information from different people in different ways.
- Factual information from trusted doctors and health care workers. Communities of color are more likely to believe information that they receive from medical providers of color.
- Factual information from other trusted sources: local religious organizations and leaders, schools, community leaders and advocates
- Seeing examples of medical providers or other trusted members of the community getting vaccinated
- Having celebrities or well-known local people get vaccinated

- Promoting vaccination as a social norm so that people think that “this is what people like me do.”
- Sharing information about the high risk of contracting COVID-19 and the seriousness of the disease and comparing the risk of that with the minor risks of vaccination
- Preparing people for side effects of vaccination such as soreness at the injection site, and possibly a day of feeling sick. A very few people who receive *any* vaccination will have an allergic reaction. This can be quickly treated and even when it occurs is less serious than having COVID-19.
- Preparing people for unrelated medical events and deaths. In any large group of people, particularly those who are elderly, over weeks and months some of them will get sick, and some may die. This would happen whether or not they are vaccinated, and it does not mean that it was *caused* by the vaccination.
For example, in any given week, out of 10 million people aged 55-64, within one week 1,705 will have a heart attack and 793 will die of some cause. This will continue to happen whether or not they are vaccinated and is not related to vaccination.
- COVID-19 vaccines are a new, complicated and rapidly changing topic. If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t guess. Promise to find out and respond later.

What doesn’t work:

- Trying to disprove vaccine myths, such as those related to autism. Instead, focus on the lives saved by vaccines in general, the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines (see *COVID-19 Vaccination Fact Sheet*), and the serious risks of COVID-19.
- Trying to convert hardened vaccine opponents – focus instead on the much larger group of people who aren’t yet sure whether to get vaccinated.
- Shaming or ridiculing people for their beliefs, dismissing their fears, or calling them “antivax”
- Avoid restating false claims (even to explain that they are not true)

Need more ideas? [Here](#) is some more detailed guidance from the Berkeley Media Studies Group