

COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs

As part of our mission to improve the health and well-being of North Carolinians, UNC Health plans to take every step to examine the safety and efficacy of each COVID-19 vaccine candidate. During this pandemic, now more than ever, it is critical that you have all the available information so you can feel confident in deciding how to protect yourself.

About the COVID-19 Vaccines

What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccines currently prevent millions of deaths every year from diseases like diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, measles, and influenza. They work by training and preparing the body's natural defenses - the immune system - to recognize and fight off the viruses and bacteria they target. This way, if the body is exposed to those disease-causing germs later, the body is immediately ready to destroy them, preventing illness. Vaccines are also critical to the prevention and control of infectious disease outbreaks.

With a COVID-19 vaccine, UNC Health highly recommends healthcare personnel and patients receive a vaccine before they are exposed to the disease to prevent them from being sick.

How is the vaccine administered?

A COVID-19 vaccine may be received as a shot into the muscle of the upper arm. A second dose is then administered either three or four weeks later, depending on the vaccine.

What happens if I get only one dose of the two-dose COVID-19 vaccine?

At this time, we do not know the effects from only receiving one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. However, we believe it would make the vaccine much less effective. UNC Health strongly recommends that everyone receive their second dose in a timely manner so that they may receive the maximum protection from the vaccine.

Are there any groups who should NOT receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

Children, pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and immunocompromised individuals were not included in Phase Two of clinical trials, so we do not have a recommendation for these groups at this time. We expect to learn more details in the next few weeks as part of any authorization for use from the FDA.

What if I have already had COVID-19? Should I still get the vaccine?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and UNC Health recommend all eligible healthcare personnel and patients receive the COVID-19 vaccine regardless of their prior infection status. Additionally, a prior COVID-19 infection may not indicate immunity to the disease in the future.

Would I test positive for COVID-19 after receiving this vaccine?

No, you will not test positive on nose, throat, or saliva tests because of the vaccine. You may test positive on the blood test (antibody), but this is not the test that we use to determine if someone is currently sick with COVID-19.

If you have an antibody test for COVID-19 after receiving the vaccine, you may see a positive result. A positive antibody test indicates past infection with SARS-CoV-2 or having had a vaccine.

A positive PCR COVID-19 test most often indicates current infection with SARS-CoV-2, although the PCR test may in some people remain positive for months. Receiving the vaccine will NOT lead to a positive PCR COVID-19 test.

The Effectiveness and Side Effects of COVID-19 Vaccines

How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine in the short- and long-term?

As of late November, early results from multiple studies of COVID-19 vaccines have been made public. These trials show that for people who received both doses of the vaccine, the vaccine is about 95% effective at preventing people from getting sick with COVID-19. This means there were 95% fewer people with COVID-19 in the study groups getting the vaccine compared to the groups who received a placebo.

We do not know the long-term ability of COVID-19 vaccines to prevent infection at this time. It is possible that vaccine recipients will need additional doses (boosters) of the vaccine in the future.

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

Individuals who receive a COVID-19 vaccine may experience mild to moderate side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine. Trials have shown the side effects typically occur at the site of the injection and do not last beyond a few days.

The most common side effect caused by the vaccine includes pain at the site where the vaccine was given, which is in the arm. Other side effects may include a headache, fever, chills, or muscle aches - especially after the second shot.

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

We are not aware of long-term side effects of COVID-19 vaccines at this time. However, based on prior vaccine trials, we remain confident in recommending the COVID-19 vaccines. As we receive more data in the coming weeks and months, we will continue to share updated information.

Why should I trust this vaccine for the prevention of COVID-19? If I receive the vaccine, will I become immune to COVID-19?

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We do not know the long-term efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines at this time. It is possible that vaccine recipients will need additional doses (boosters) of the vaccine in the future.

Research on COVID-19 Vaccines

Have researchers from UNC Health and the UNC School of Medicine looked at the clinical trial data and/or vetted the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. We are extremely fortunate to have experts at UNC Health and the UNC School of Medicine, who are working together to review all of the available data and ensure the vaccine is safe for our healthcare personnel and patients.

We plan to rely on these experts, along with national ones like Dr. Anthony Fauci, to interpret the data. As we receive more data, our experts will continue to review and share any updated information.

What does it mean if the COVID-19 vaccine is provided under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)? If I receive the COVID-19 vaccine, am I participating in a clinical trial?

The Food & Drug Administration (FDA) may approve COVID-19 vaccines under an 'Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).' The EUA allows the FDA to help strengthen the nation's public health protections by providing more timely access to the approved vaccines.

Were diverse groups included in COVID-19 vaccine trials?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccine trials included diverse and underrepresented groups.