

COVID-19 VACCINE FAQ

What is the District doing to help make sure people can get vaccinated against COVID-19?

DC Health is working with partners at the federal, state, local and community level to work through the logistics of delivering, storing and administering the COVID-19 vaccine. The Department of Human Services is working with DC Health and Unity Health Care to ensure neighbors who are currently unhoused have access to the vaccine. They will be visiting shelters, hotels, and encampments over the next month to ensure residents have the opportunity to get vaccinated.

Currently, individuals who work in health care settings and DC residents who are 65 and older are able to make appointments to get vaccinated through the District's vaccination portal - vaccinate.dc.gov - or by calling the coronavirus hotline at 855-363-0333 to schedule an appointment. The call center is open Monday through Friday from 8 am to 7pm and Saturday from 8 am to 4 pm.

Why is it important to get vaccinated?

Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 will be the best way to protect yourself and everyone around you.

A vaccine for COVID-19 is only one of the ways to stop the spread of the disease. Because the supply of vaccine will be limited at first, doing other things to help stop the spread will be just as important as it is now. This means still wearing a facemask, staying at least 6 feet away from others, washing your hands frequently, and staying home if you are sick.

Do the COVID-19 vaccines have any side effects?

After the COVID-19 vaccination, you may have some side effects. This is normal and means the vaccine is working. Common side effects include: pain at the inject site, fever, chills, body aches, and fatigue.

The medical provider administering your vaccine will talk with you more about what side effects to expect and provide helpful tips on how to reduce pain and discomfort after your vaccination.

How many doses of a COVID-19 vaccine will be needed? Will a booster dose be needed?

The coronavirus vaccines that have been approved so far require two doses. Depending on which vaccine you receive, you will either receive the second dose 21 days after your first dose or 28 days after your first dose. The second shot you get helps the vaccine become more effective and last longer.

If you had the virus and recovered will you still be able or need to get the vaccine?

Individuals who already had and recovered from COVID-19 should still get vaccinated. We do not know how long antibodies last after infection or whether they will protect against reinfection. So, while vaccine trials are being completed, it will be important for scientists to continue learning about COVID-19, particularly whether people who got sick with COVID-19 can be re-infected.

Once I get vaccinated, will I receive any sort of documentation to show that I have received the COVID-19 vaccine?

Since both of the COVID-19 vaccines approved so far require two doses, you will receive a COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card once you receive your first dose. It will also remind you of when you will need to return to receive your second dose. You will need to bring the card with you when you return for the second dose so that it can be documented on the card.

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Will I still need to wear a mask after I receive the vaccine?

Yes, because it will take months to vaccinate the entire community, you should continue to wear a mask, social distance, practice good hygiene, and avoid crowds and gatherings.

How do I sign up to receive the vaccine?

The Department of Human Services is working with Unity Health Care to distribute the vaccine to unhoused residents in the District. They will be visiting shelters, hotels, and encampments over the next few months to ensure residents have the opportunity to get vaccinated.

We encourage individuals who are 65 and older, or who meet the current District vaccine access guidelines, to attempt to make appointments to get vaccinated through the District's vaccination portal - vaccinate.dc.gov - or by calling the coronavirus hotline at 855-363-0333 to schedule an appointment. The call center is open Monday through Friday from 8 am to 7pm and Saturday from 8 am to 4 pm.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

The COVID Vaccine was developed quickly. How do I know it's safe?

Scientists had a head start on these vaccines. For years, scientists at the National Institutes of Health and the University of Pennsylvania have been working to create this type of vaccine, following outbreaks of other coronaviruses like SARS and MERS.

Furthermore, tens of thousands of people participated in vaccine trials in 2020. Since the vaccines became available, millions of people around the world have already received the vaccine.

What are the common misconceptions about the COVID-19 vaccine?

Now that there are authorized and recommended COVID-19 vaccines in the U.S., accurate vaccine information is critical. Here are the facts behind some of the most common vaccine myths:

MYTH: COVID-19 vaccines are used to microchip people.

FACT: There is no vaccine microchip, and the vaccine will not track people or gather personal information into a database.

MYTH: You can get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

FACT: The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19. None of the COVID-19 vaccines currently in development in the United States use the live virus that causes COVID-19. The vaccine teaches your body to build and recognize an example of the protein spike that is part of the coronavirus. Because it is just the spike and not an actual virus, you will not get sick when your body builds an example spike. The response some people have to the vaccine (headache, fever, chills, sore arm) is because your immune system is recognizing something new and unusual and launching an attack on it.

MYTH: COVID-19 vaccines will alter my DNA.

FACT: The COVID-19 vaccine will not alter your DNA. According to the CDC, the first COVID-19 vaccines to reach the market are messenger RNA, or mRNA, vaccines. When we receive the vaccine, our bodies are instructed to build examples of the coronavirus protein spike. Then, our immune system recognizes the spikes as unusual and attacks them. While it's doing that, it also remembers what the spike looks like.

Without the vaccine, when the coronavirus enters your body, your immune system does not recognize quick enough that it is bad, and that gives the virus plenty of time to spread through your system and make you sick. Without the vaccine, your immune system is left desperately trying to play catch up as the virus spreads through your body.

The vaccine does NOT involve injecting you with COVID-19 and it does NOT change your DNA or your genetic code.