

Center for Public Representation  
Vaccine Q&A

## **COVID-19 Explanations**

*What is COVID-19?*

- It is a new virus or illness that has spread all around the world.
- It is like the seasonal flu, but can lead to more serious illness or death.
- Sometimes it is called Coronavirus or just COVID or COVID-19.

*How does the COVID-19 virus spread?*

- COVID spreads in the air and on surfaces.
- When someone with COVID coughs or sneezes their germs get in the air and on things they are near.
- Germs get into your body through your mouth and nose.
- You can have the virus without showing any signs of being sick.

Masks protect you by covering your nose and mouth and helping to keep germs from getting in.

Wearing a mask also reduces your chance of spreading COVID to others. This is why masks are so important to keep everyone healthy and safe.

For people who cannot use a cloth mouth covering because of their disability, there are other ways of masking and staying physically distant that can reduce risk.

Accommodations may include:

- the use clear face shields that allow for lip reading;
- arranging direct access to medical appointment rooms without using a waiting area; and
- asking to be escorted through less crowded areas of a hospital or medical facility.

## **Vaccine Explanations**

*What is a vaccine?*

- A vaccine is medication, usually a shot, that can help prevent you from getting a disease.
- Vaccines train your body's immune system to protect you from the virus. That way if you are exposed to COVID, your body knows how to protect itself and keep you from getting sick.
- Most vaccines require a booster shot to continue working over time.

*What COVID-19 vaccines are available today in the United States?*

- As of March, 2021, there are three vaccines approved for COVID-19. All are effective at preventing serious illness, including hospitalization and death.
- Pfizer and Moderna (both require 2 shots - 21-28 days apart)
- Johnson & Johnson (J&J) (requires only 1 shot)

#### *What is in the vaccines?*

- None of the vaccines contain live coronavirus.
- **You cannot get COVID-19 from taking the vaccine.**
- The ingredient lists can be found at:
- Pfizer: <https://www.fda.gov/media/144414/download> (pg. 2)
- Moderna: <https://www.fda.gov/media/144638/download> (pg. 2)
- J & J: <https://www.fda.gov/media/146305/download> (pg. 2)

#### *Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe?*

- Yes. The COVID-19 vaccine has been researched and tested in the same way all vaccines are reviewed and approved. Experts working with the CDC and FDA, and medical experts in Massachusetts, have said the vaccine is safe for emergency use.
- For a quick and simple explanation of how the vaccine was developed so quickly watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5yG3lCC3qI>
- Each vaccine is tested on tens of thousands of people to make sure it is safe and effective. These people were different ages and races, and they had different health problems. Very few people had serious reactions to the vaccine.
- The Center for Disease Control is also tracking side effects experienced by people receiving the vaccines today.

#### *Is the COVID-19 Vaccine safe for me?*

- Very few serious side effects have been reported, and millions of people have already received the vaccine. If you are worried about a medical condition you have, including a history of allergies, talk with your doctor or specialist before being vaccinated.
- People with a history of severe allergic reactions may want to receive the vaccine in a medical environment.
- People who use Epi-pens or other rescue medication should bring this with them to the vaccination site.
- If you have other rare conditions your doctor can tell you if the vaccine is safe for you.
- You should **not** get the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines if you have a history of severe allergic reaction (also called “anaphylaxis”) to any ingredient in the vaccine.
  - The vaccines do not contain eggs, gelatin, preservatives, or latex.
  - The ingredients of the vaccines are linked in this guide.

### *Does the COVID-19 Vaccine have toxic or dangerous ingredients?*

- No, this is a myth. The COVID-19 vaccine does not have any toxic or dangerous ingredients.

### *Where do I get the vaccine?*

- There are 7 mass vaccination sites across the state. These include: Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, the Eastfield Mall in Springfield, the Natick Mall in Natick, the DoubleTree Hotel in Danvers, the former Circuit City in Dartmouth, the Hynes Convention Center in Boston, and the Reggie Lewis Center in Roxbury.
- Many local hospitals are operating public vaccine clinics.
- Some local boards of health are providing vaccines.
- More vaccines are becoming available at local pharmacies.
- People who live in subsidized elderly or disabled housing should have an option to be vaccinated where they live.
- Massachusetts is developing a mobile vaccination program for people who meet the MassHealth definition of “homebound.”
- To find a vaccination location near you visit:  
<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccination-locations>

### *How do I sign up to get the vaccine?*

- The State vaccine finder website is <https://www.mass.gov/COVID-19-vaccine>.
- You can also call 211 to receive help scheduling an appointment over the phone.
- Massachusetts managed care companies are assisting their members in locating vaccine appointments. If you have a care manager as part of your health plan, this person may be able to help you.
- Now you can pre-register instead of using the vaccine finder website.
  - To pre-register:
    - Complete the online form at [mass.gov/COVIDVaccine](https://mass.gov/COVIDVaccine) to request to book an appointment at a mass vaccination site nearby.
    - You will get a confirmation on your phone or email and you will receive a weekly update about your status.
    - When an appointment is available at a mass vaccination site, you will be notified and will have 24 hours to accept the appointment
    - You can cancel your preregistration at any time.
    - The preregistration form allows family members, caregivers or other companions to fill out the form on behalf of someone else.
    - You can also call 2-1-1 to preregister.

### *What is it like to get the vaccine?*

- The COVID-19 vaccine is a shot. It is typically given in your upper arm, but you can request a different spot.
- If you receive the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, you should schedule your second shot at the same time you receive your first shot.

- Shots are administered by trained staff, including pharmacists, EMTs, nurses and doctors.
- After the shot, you will be asked to wait about 15 minutes to make sure you don't have a bad reaction.

*How will I feel after getting the vaccine?*

- Your arm might be sore, you might feel achy or have a headache. These feelings might last a few days. Some side effects are normal, and mean the vaccine is working. If you are worried about how you are feeling after getting the vaccine, talk to your doctor.
- You can report your symptoms using an app called V-Safe or on the Center for Disease Control V-Safe website - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/vsafe.html>

*What happens if I miss my second shot appointment?*

- If this happens, you can call the place where you got your first shot and ask to reschedule as soon as possible.
- Both vaccine doses must be from the same vaccine maker.

*Will I get to choose which vaccine I get?*

- No. Due to the limited supply of vaccines, you will not get to choose which one you get. However, when you sign up for a vaccine appointment, you should be able to find out which vaccines are being given at that site.

*How much does it cost?*

- The vaccine is **FREE** for Massachusetts residents!

*When can I get the vaccine?*

- It depends. Because there aren't enough vaccine shots for everyone right now the State has decided who gets the shot first. The state created priorities for certain groups of people to be vaccinated. That list is still changing. An updated copy can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-covid-19-vaccination-phases>
- The federal government is recommending that all people be made eligible for the vaccine after May 1, 2021.

*Can my support person come with me when I get the vaccine?*

- Yes, you can bring your support person with you. A support person could be a family member, a trusted friend, or a staff person.
- You can also bring some sensory items

*When does the vaccine take effect?*

- The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are fully effective 2 weeks after the second shot.
- The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is fully effective two weeks after the 1 shot.

*Will I still need to wear a mask, social distance, and wash my hands after I get the vaccine?*

- Yes, when you are out in public you should still wear a mask and stay socially distant from people outside your household.
- When you are in private with other people who have been vaccinated you do not need to wear a mask.
- If you are visiting people *from a single household*, who are not vaccinated and not at high risk for COVID, then you can visit inside without a mask.
- But if you are visiting unvaccinated people from *multiple households* then you still need to wear a mask and stay 6 feet apart.
- It is better to play it safe and continue to wear a mask outside of your home for now. It is important for everyone to do these things until doctors learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine. Wearing a mask, social distancing and frequent washing hands will also help protect you from other viruses like the flu.

You can read more of the CDC's guidance at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

*If you are the only person in the house who is vaccinated do you need to quarantine from others who are not vaccinated?*

- If the others are not at high risk for COVID then you do not need to quarantine, socially distance or wear a mask. If people in your home are at high risk for COVID you should continue to wear a mask and socially distance from them, but you do not need to quarantine.

There is a great deal of information out there about the vaccines, but not all of it is correct. It is important to use trusted and reliable medical sources when answering questions about the COVID vaccine. Below are resources the Center for Public Representation has reviewed and believes to be trustworthy and accurate.

## **Resource Guide:**

Latest Massachusetts COVID-19 Vaccination Plan update

[COVID-19 Vaccination Program | Mass.gov](#)

When can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

[Massachusetts' COVID-19 vaccination phases | Mass.gov](#)

FAQs for the general public, **available in multiple languages**

[COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions | Mass.gov](#)

Trust the Facts, Get the Vax Campaign Materials, **including videos in many languages**

[Trust the Facts, Get the Vax Campaign Materials | Mass.gov](#)

For other questions related to COVID-19 vaccine in Massachusetts, please email:

[COVID-19-Vaccine-Plan-MA@mass.gov](mailto:COVID-19-Vaccine-Plan-MA@mass.gov)

Center for Public Representation COVID-19 website

<https://www.centerforpublicrep.org/covid-19/>

COVID-19 Vaccine information from CDC

[COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](#)

[CDC COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkits](#)

**Plain Language Resources:**

Fact sheets on topics such as mask wearing, social distancing, and stopping the spread of germs

[COVID-19 Printable Fact Sheets | Mass.gov](#)

Maine Developmental Disability Council – Information About Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine

<https://maineddc.org/covid-vaccine-info-consent>

**Equity Resources**

Vaccine appointment sign up provided by the Black Boston COVID Coalition

<https://blackbostoncoalition.org/updates-info/bhmevent21>

Vaccine outreach and education initiative in Greater Boston

<https://gotvax.org>

Vaccine Equity Now! petition and demands

<https://blackbostoncoalition.org/updates-info/vencpetition>