

# COVID-19 VACCINE FAQ

**Q: Is the FDA going to grant Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer vaccine? And what does that mean?**

**A:** We expect the FDA to do this in the next two weeks. In an emergency, like a pandemic, the FDA can make a judgment that it's worth releasing something for use even without the typical timeline for a new vaccine or drug. If there's evidence that strongly suggests that patients have benefited from the vaccine in clinical trials, the agency can issue an EUA to make it available. Current data from the manufacturers for this vaccine, and the upcoming one from Moderna, strongly indicate that both vaccines are safe and effective. These vaccines will continue to be studied, as is true with all vaccines. We expect to receive a delivery of vaccines very soon after the FDA grants this EUA.

**Q: As a Houston Methodist employee, will I be required to get a COVID-19 vaccine?**

**A:** We will not initially require our employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine until there are adequate supplies of the vaccine. Until then, our employees will be offered the vaccine based on a prioritized risk-based system, with frontline COVID-19 caregivers going first. If the evidence continues to demonstrate that it is safe and effective, we will strongly encourage our clinical staff to take the vaccine when requested to keep them safe.

**Q: Is it safe?**

**A:** Before the FDA grants Emergency Use Authorization, the safety and efficacy of the vaccines will be reviewed by panels of independent experts retained by the companies; by FDA scientific staff; and by an independent panel of experts convened by the FDA. There are no reported serious safety concerns from these two vaccines. The CDC and the FDA will continue to monitor individuals who have received the vaccine to ensure there's no evidence of even rare safety issues.

We understand some of you might be nervous about the vaccine, but as health care workers, we have a duty to protect our patients and each other, and we would never seek to put our employees in harm's way. We would only ask you to do this if we believe it will safely protect you, your family and our patients.

Please also keep in mind that COVID-19 can be a fatal or debilitating disease, even in young, healthy people. The risks from contracting the virus are greater than the possible risks from receiving the vaccine.

**Q: Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?**

**A:** It is not possible to get COVID-19 from vaccines. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use only a gene from the virus while other vaccines being studied use inactivated virus. None of these can cause COVID-19.

**Q: Who will get the vaccine first?**

**A:** We will administer the vaccine based on your risk of exposure to COVID-19. For example, clinicians working in the COVID-19 ICUs will be prioritized, and then people working in COVID-19 units, including the Emergency Rooms. Employees without patient-facing jobs will receive their vaccines at a later date. For a look at our planned tiered system, please [see this chart](#).



**Q: How did Houston Methodist come up with this tiered approach?**

**A:** We used guidelines from the National Academy of Medicine, the CDC and Health and Human Services to draft the priorities — one set for employees and physicians/other providers and another set for patients.

**Q: Once the vaccine is approved and distributed to Houston Methodist, how will I schedule my vaccine and where will I get it?**

**A:** You will receive detailed information on when and how to schedule your vaccine from Employee Health. The sign-up process will be like the online sign-up process for Houston Methodist’s surveillance testing and online flu vaccination process. If you have questions, you can call Employee Health at 346.356.3030. Your second dose will be scheduled at the time of the first vaccine.

Vaccines will be administered at every Houston Methodist hospital except Continuing Care — employees there will get their vaccine at HM West. It will not be offered at other sites because of the strict restrictions for cold-storing the vaccine.

**Q: If it is not my turn to get the vaccine, will I be turned away at Employee Health?**

**A:** Yes. Although there should be adequate vaccine for all employees eventually, we must be strict about protecting those who are most at risk. We will verify your position in the prioritization system before you are given a vaccine and if it is not your turn, you will be asked to return at the appropriate time and day.

**Q: Will there be exceptions to getting the vaccine once it is eventually mandated by Houston Methodist?**

**A:** Much like the flu shot, if we make the vaccine mandatory in the future, there will be limited exemptions available. For now, the vaccines are strongly recommended, but not required.

**Q: How many doses of a COVID-19 vaccine will I need?**

**A:** Both of the first two vaccines awaiting FDA-approval will require two doses. An initial vaccination and then a second shot either three or four weeks later. The Pfizer vaccine requires a booster 21 days later and the Moderna vaccine requires a second dose 28 days later. The different vaccine products are not interchangeable. The second dose must be completed with the same vaccine brand as the first dose. Both doses are important to ensure full protection.

**Q: When will Houston Methodist receive the COVID-19 vaccine?**

**A:** We anticipate administering the vaccine to our first group of employees starting in mid-December. Pfizer indicated that it plans to get the vaccine to health care providers 24 hours after receiving Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA. Other vaccines are going through this process also. The [New York Times Coronavirus Drug and Treatment Tracker](#) is following 21 treatments for effectiveness and safety. This resource is updated frequently.

**Q: What are the side effects?**

**A:** Pfizer has said that some Phase III clinical trial participants experienced mild-to-moderate side effects with its investigational COVID-19 vaccine candidate. Scientists anticipate that the shots may cause mild flu-like side effects — including sore arms, muscle aches and fever. Therefore, we are recommending that you take ibuprofen or acetaminophen (if you can safely take them) before you get the vaccine. This will help to significantly alleviate the side effects. Study participants did not take pain relievers before their vaccines.

**Q: What if I am concerned about my side effects?**

**A:** Please seek medical attention immediately by calling your doctor's office or setting up a virtual visit if you experience severe side effects. Later, please contact Employee Health to report your symptoms.

**Q: Will I have to take PTO if I get sick from the COVID-19 vaccine?**

A: In the unlikely event you are not able to come to work due to the side effects from the vaccine, you will have to take PTO as you normally would. If you are concerned about side effects, please schedule your vaccination the day before a regularly scheduled day off.

**Q: What if I miss my second dose?**

A: These two COVID-19 vaccines are not completely effective unless you receive the second dose. Your second dose will be scheduled when you go to Employee Health for your first shot.

**Q: What if I'm in a lower tier, but I am high risk based on my health issues — can I move up?**

A: Houston Methodist is developing an opt-in process for employees who may be at high risk due to a health condition. We will have more information on this soon. Please know it is unlikely you will move up in prioritization ahead of those working directly with patients.

**Q: Will the vaccine be available to non-employed medical staff and allied health providers?**

A: Yes. We have considered these physicians and allied health professionals in our tiered system. Please [see this chart](#).

**Q: Can I get the vaccine for my staff if I am not an employed physician?**

A: At this point, we are waiting for federal and state guidance on the order of vaccine delivery and on the supply of vaccine made available to us.

**Q: Will the COVID-19 vaccine be free to Houston Methodist employees and physicians?**

A: Yes, the vaccine is being provided to our employees, physicians and allied health professionals for free.

**Q: Will we administer the vaccine to our patients?**

A: Under the guidance from the CDC and Health and Human Services, frontline and other health care workers will receive the first deliveries, then followed by patients according to a risk-based strategy.

**Q: Why do I have to get a vaccine?**

A: We are not making the vaccine mandatory at this time, but we are strongly encouraging that our employees get it for your own safety and the safety of our patients. Stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines work with your immune system so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Other steps, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask and staying at least 6 feet away from others, help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus and spreading it to others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following CDC's recommendations [to protect yourself and others](#) will offer the best protection from COVID-19. Remember we are committed to providing unparalleled safety, quality, service and innovation.

**Q: I don't work directly with patients. Will I eventually be asked to get the vaccine? If so, why?**

A: Because the data from the clinical trials indicate that the vaccines are safe and effective, it is a smart thing to do to protect yourself, your family and your coworkers. The majority of our employees who have gotten sick with COVID-19 have contracted it in the community, not at work. And remember the more people in the community who get the vaccine the better chance we have of getting rid of the COVID-19 virus. This group will be in the last tier to be offered the vaccine.

**Q: I have a health condition that prevents me from getting vaccines with live viruses. Do you know if the COVID-19 vaccine uses a live virus?**

A: Both Pfizer and Moderna's vaccines are mRNA vaccines, and AstraZeneca's and Johnson & Johnson's are

non-replicating vectored vaccines. None of the early vaccines being tested are live weakened versions of the virus. When vaccines are licensed, part of the information that will be provided will include who should or should not get each vaccine. At that time, we recommend talking with your health care provider to determine which vaccine will be the best one for you to get, given your medical history.

**Q: When can my family receive a vaccine from Houston Methodist?**

**A:** Based on the federal guidelines, Houston Methodist is only providing employees, physicians, other providers and patients with the COVID-19 vaccine. When there is adequate vaccine, family members may be able to get them at HM, go to their doctor or retail outlets to receive their vaccination, much like they do with the flu vaccine.

**Q: Can a COVID-19 vaccine be given to a person sick with COVID-19?**

**A:** We expect that will be based on the degree of the person's illness. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) will make this clear in its "precautions and contraindications" advice regarding each of the vaccines.

**Q: If I have had COVID-19 should I get the vaccine?**

**A:** Yes. While individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 do produce antibodies, the antibody levels and how long they last are not known.

**Q: Will you check my antibodies at some point after I get the vaccine?**

**A:** We are prepared to do this if the guidance for the vaccine includes subsequent antibody testing. We will keep you informed.

**Q: Do I have to continue wearing a mask after I get the vaccine?**

**A:** Yes. We should all continue wearing face masks, practicing excellent hand hygiene and social distancing until enough vaccine is manufactured and distributed, until we know how long a vaccine will protect us, and until our community shows levels of minimal spread.

**Q: Will I be required to wear all other PPE when caring for patients as outlined in the infection prevention protocols?**

**A:** Yes. Please keep in mind that much still needs to be learned about the virus and the vaccine. To ensure that you are optimally protected we ask that you continue to practice the same precautions mandated by Houston Methodist.

**Q: What do I do if I have further questions?**

**A:** If you have questions about scheduling, please call Employee Health at 346.356.3030. If you have questions about the science or other general vaccine questions, please email [askcovid@houstonmethodist.org](mailto:askcovid@houstonmethodist.org).

## VACCINE SECTION

### Q: What is a vaccine?

A: According to the CDC, a vaccine stimulates your immune system to produce antibodies and cellular immunity to combat that specific disease, like it would if you were actually exposed to the disease. After getting vaccinated, you develop immunity to that disease without having to get the disease first. This is why vaccines are necessary — they prevent disease by letting you develop immunity in a safe and controlled way.

### Q: How does the vaccine for COVID-19 work?

A: Pfizer and Moderna's vaccines use novel messenger-RNA, or [mRNA](#), technology, which uses genetic material to cause the body to create a protein from the virus. The immune system then recognizes the virus and attacks it. This would be the first mRNA product to be approved by the FDA. The study has enrolled 43,538 volunteers. About 42% of global participants and 30% of U.S. participants have racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. In Pfizer and BioNTech's late-stage clinical trial, 50% of the volunteers got the vaccine, while the other half got a placebo of saltwater. Then they waited to see who would get sick. Only 170 volunteers out of 44,000 have so far gotten sick with COVID-19. An independent board of experts looked at the placebo and vaccine participants and reported that the vaccine is 95% effective. See [this story](#) to learn more about mRNA vaccines. And [this story](#) from Time Magazine gives a great overview. See [this infographic](#) for a quick study on how the mRNA vaccine works.

### Q: Are there other vaccines being studied?

A: The AstraZeneca and University of Oxford team, as well as Johnson & Johnson/Janssen, are also working on a vaccine but using different technology for delivering the viral genes that can produce viral proteins to activate the immune system. Novavax and the Sanofi/GlaxoSmithKline are working on a vaccine that uses proteins themselves to trigger an immune response. All are close to completing their testing. To track the vaccine trials, please see this [updated tracker](#) in the New York Times.

### Q: Will it keep me from getting COVID-19?

A: Current data show that both the Pfizer vaccine and Moderna vaccines are 95% effective in preventing the person from getting COVID-19. The studies did not test everyone to see how many people in the vaccinated group got infected compared with the placebo group. Instead, the scientists compared how many in the vaccinated group and the placebo group went on to develop the disease. The companies will continue to test people in the studies for antibodies to the COVID-19 virus, which would include people who did not show any symptoms of their infection, so they can get a better sense of whether or not the vaccines protect against not only getting sick, but also against infection.

### Q: Are there challenges with the distribution?

A: These vaccines will require two doses and need to be kept at very low temperatures — much colder than a household freezer. Many hospitals and clinics do not have the ability to store the medicine at these ultra-low temperatures, so that must be worked out once these vaccines get FDA approval. At Houston Methodist, we have ample cold-storage facilities to hold whichever vaccine we use for patients and employees. And, during distribution, we still need to keep the vaccines cold and the temperature strictly monitored, making the distributing challenging. However, Houston Methodist has teams working on our plans for this and we are prepared to store and safely distribute the vaccines we receive.

### Q: How long will it take for the vaccine to begin protecting me?

A: It normally takes about two to three weeks for cellular immunity to develop and several weeks for a full antibody response.

**Q: Will getting the flu vaccine protect me from COVID-19?**

**A:** A flu vaccine will not protect you from getting COVID-19, but it can prevent you from getting influenza (flu) at the same time as COVID-19. This can keep you from having a more severe illness. While it's not possible to say with certainty what will happen in the winter, CDC believes it's likely that flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will both spread during that time. You should encourage all of your friends and family to get flu shots, just like we have at Houston Methodist.

**Q: Will COVID-19 vaccines cause me to test positive on COVID-19 viral tests?**

**A:** No. These vaccines will not cause you to test positive on [viral tests](#), which are used to see if you have a current infection. If your body develops an immune response, which is the goal of vaccination, there is a possibility you may test positive on some [antibody tests](#). Antibody tests indicate you had a previous infection or vaccination and that you may have some level of protection against the virus. Experts are currently looking at how COVID-19 vaccination may affect antibody testing results.

**Q: Will people who have gotten sick with COVID-19 still benefit from getting vaccinated?**

**A:** Due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19, and the fact that re-infection with COVID-19 is possible, people may be advised to get a COVID-19 vaccine even if they have been sick with COVID-19 previously. At this time, experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. The immunity someone gains from having an infection, called natural immunity, varies from person to person, and the evidence suggests natural immunity may not last very long in some people.

**Q: What are the odds I'll still catch COVID-19?**

**A:** According to the CDC, we won't know how long immunity lasts until we have a vaccine and more data on how well it works. Both natural immunity and vaccine-induced immunity are important aspects of COVID-19 that experts are trying to learn more about. The CDC will keep the public informed as new evidence becomes available.

**Q: Is this an annual shot?**

**A:** Scientists are still studying this and will determine this once the vaccine is distributed and more data is available.

**Q: Do the new vaccine trial results mean the end to the pandemic?**

**A:** In the short term, no. The soonest that coronavirus vaccines could become widely available to the public would be in the spring. But if effective vaccines become available — and if most people get them — the pandemic could drastically shrink. This means we are one giant step closer to getting our lives back to normal.