

CHS COVID-19 FAQs

What's the status of the COVID-19 vaccine?

The new COVID-19 vaccine is now in New York. We are following CDC guidelines, meaning our first priority is to immunize patient care staff at greatest risk: ED, Critical Care and dedicated COVID units. Also, we are working with CVS to have residents at our skilled nursing homes immunized. The U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) granted Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) to the vaccine because in trials with tens of thousands of participants it showed itself to be extraordinarily effective, close to 95%, with little or no side effects, lasting only 24-48 hours.

As a CHS employee, will I be required to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

We will not initially require our employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine. This is subject to change should New York State decide to make the vaccination mandatory for health care workers. Until then, our employees will be offered the vaccine based on a prioritized risk-based system, with frontline COVID-19 caregivers going first.

Is it safe?

The safety and efficacy of the vaccines was 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. In addition, NYS hired its own investigative staff to ensure that there were 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 safety. 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 known risks from receiving the vaccine.

What are the side effects?

Pfizer has said that some Phase III clinical trial participants experienced mild-to-moderate side effects with its investigational COVID-19 vaccine candidates. Scientists anticipate that the shots may cause mild flu-like side effects—including sore arms, muscle aches and fever for a day or two. 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.

What if I am concerned about my side effects?

You will have a 20-minute observation period after each vaccine, where you will be monitored by Employee Health Staff. This will be in close proximity to the Emergency Department. If side effects occur later, please seek medical attention immediately by calling your doctor's office or setting up a virtual consultation via CHS eVisit. Later, please contact Employee Health to report your symptoms.

Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

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

Allocation of Vaccine

The COVID-19 vaccine will be administered to those at greatest risk of exposure and greatest risk due to comorbidities. The vaccine is given in two doses in an interval determined by the manufacturer.

- Critical Care and Emergency Department staff, inclusive of Anesthesia, Respiratory Therapy, Intensivists; all physicians involved in care of Critical Care and Emergency Department patients.
- Long-Term Care workers who interact with residents. This includes all CHS SNFs, Home Care and Hospice Divisions, as appropriate.
- Employees on dedicated COVID units.
- EVS and Plant Maintenance of above units.
- At discretion of local leadership.

What determines the priority groups?

We use guidelines set forth by the National Academy of Medicine, the CDC and New York State Department of Health to draft the priorities.

Once the vaccine is approved and distributed to CHS, how will I schedule my vaccine and where will I get it?

Each CHS entity/location will set up its own distribution program working through their local Employee Health Department.

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

Yes. Although there should be an 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 and contact you when it is your turn. If it's not your turn, you will be asked to wait.

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

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 booster 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.

When will CHS receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

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.

Will I have to take sick time if I get sick from the COVID-19 vaccine?

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 sick time as you normally would.

What if I miss my second dose?

You will not be allowed to schedule the vaccine if you can't commit to the second dose. These two COVID-19 vaccines are not completely effective unless you receive the second dose. In the event of an emergency that causes you to miss the second dose, please contact Employee Health for guidance.

Risk based on my health issues — can I move up?

It is unlikely you will move up in prioritization ahead of those working in high-risk areas. You may wish to contact your private physician to determine if they have an option to get you vaccinated sooner.

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

Yes. We have considered these physicians and allied health professionals in our tiered system. They will be directed to submit vaccine request forms and will be prioritized based on their risk level.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine be free to employees and physicians?

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

Will we administer the vaccine to our patients?

Under the guidance from the CDC and Health and Human Services, frontline and other health care workers will receive the first deliveries. In the future, planning will take place to vaccinate patients.

Do I have to get a vaccine?

We are not making the vaccine mandatory at this time, but we are strongly encouraging our employees to 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 six 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.

I don't work directly in a high risk area. Should I get the vaccine? If so, why?

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.

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?

Both Pfizer and Moderna's vaccines are messenger-RNA vaccines, and AstraZeneca's and Johnson & Johnson's are inactivated vaccines. None of the early vaccines being tested are live 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 receive, given your medical history.

Can my family receive a vaccine from CHS?

No, CHS is only providing employees and physicians with the COVID-19 vaccine. When there is an adequate supply of the vaccine, family members may be able to get them at an outpatient site, from their doctor or retail outlets, similar to the flu vaccine.

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

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.

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

Yes. While individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 do produce antibodies, the antibody levels and how long they last are not known. In general, for those with concerns regarding pregnancy and or allergic reaction, these should be discussed between patient and their physician and risk benefit analysis completed.

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

We may opt to do this if the guidance for the vaccine includes subsequent antibody testing. This will be determined at a later date.

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

Yes. We should all continue wearing face masks, practicing excellent hand hygiene and social distancing until enough of the vaccine is manufactured and distributed, we know how long a vaccine will protect us, and until our community shows minimal levels of COVID-19 spread.

Will I be required to wear all other PPE when caring for patients as outlined in the Infection Prevention protocols?

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 our Infection Control Department.

What do I do if I have further questions?

If you have questions about scheduling, please call your local Employee Health Department. If you have questions about the science or other general vaccine questions, please consult with a pharmacist.

ADDITIONAL FAQs REGARDING VACCINES

What is a vaccine?

According to the CDC, a vaccine stimulates your immune system to produce antibodies and cellular immunity to combat a specific disease, just as 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 important — they prevent disease by letting you develop immunity in a safe and controlled way.

How does the vaccine for COVID-19 work?

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 protein and attacks the virus to which it is attached. 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. An independent board of experts looked at the placebo and vaccine participants and reported that the vaccine is 95% effective.

Are there other vaccines being studied?

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.

Will it keep me from getting COVID-19?

Current data shows that both the Pfizer vaccine and Moderna vaccines are 95% effective in preventing the person from getting COVID-19. 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.

Are there challenges with the distribution?

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 vaccine at these ultra-low temperatures. CHS has ample cold-storage equipment to hold whichever vaccine we acquire. Additionally, vaccines will need to be kept at the appropriate cold temperature during distribution and we will strictly monitor the temperature. CHS has been working on our plans for this and are prepared to store and safely distribute the vaccines we receive.

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

The Pfizer vaccine requires two doses. The first one is expected to be 50% effective, then the second dose, to be administered 3 week later, should boost your immunity past 90%. It normally takes two to three weeks for cellular immunity to develop and several weeks for a full antibody response.

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

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, the 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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

Is this an annual shot?

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

Do the new vaccine trial results mean the end to the pandemic?

In the short term, no. The earliest the 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.

Allocation of Vaccine:

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Information provided by [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)