



Frequently Asked Questions about the COVID-19 Vaccine

Note: This is a living document that is frequently updated. Please visit the [Vaccination Information](#) section of the [Coronavirus Resource Center](#) for the latest version.

The federal government has been working since the pandemic started to make one or more COVID-19 vaccines available as soon as possible. There are at least 36 vaccines under investigation, and some of them have advanced far enough to be the focus of large-scale clinical trials.

At present, the FDA is evaluating reports submitted by a few vaccine manufacturers, notably Pfizer and Moderna. Provided the data meets the rigorous safety and efficacy criteria, it is likely the FDA will grant emergency-use authorization for health systems – including Virtua – to begin vaccinating front-line health care workers before the end of the month.

We asked a trio of our in-house experts – Drs. Reg Blaber, Martin Topiel, and Alejandro Herrera – to discuss COVID-19 vaccines and the many questions associated with them. This is the first in an ongoing Q&A series.

How is Virtua preparing for the likely arrival of COVID-19 vaccines?

We have assembled five committees that meet every day. These committees will address everything from logistics to resources to education. Although we don't know every detail at this moment, we will work diligently and be prepared for the vaccines when they arrive.

Will it be mandatory for all colleagues to receive the vaccine?

No, the vaccine will not be mandatory. We recognize and respect that some of our colleagues will want more time to consider their options. The goal of this Q&A series is to provide colleagues with information so that they can feel informed about the decisions they make.

How many vaccines will Virtua receive?

We do not know the number of vaccines we will receive initially. It is unlikely that there will be enough vaccines for all colleagues in the first shipment, so one of the committees is working to ensure that individuals in units/departments that have a higher risk for exposure receive priority. If you are not among the first round of people to

receive the vaccine, please know the second and subsequent shipments will quickly follow.

What is an mRNA vaccine?

If approved for emergency use authorization, this type of vaccine will be among the first available to treat COVID-19. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are messenger RNA vaccines – mRNA for short. This is a comparatively new approach to making vaccines; the vaccine teaches our immune system to produce antibodies that would protect against future infection from COVID-19 without exposing us to the virus itself.

To be clear: the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines do not give someone COVID-19, they do not use the live virus, and they do not affect or alter our DNA in any way.

How effective are these vaccines?

They appear to be very effective based on the information that is publicly available today [December 1]. Pfizer's study enrolled more than 43,000 individuals and reported 95% efficacy. Similarly, Moderna reported 94.1% efficacy for its 30,000-patient study.

Importantly, they both appeared to prevent the forms of clinical illness of COVID-19 infection characterized as “serious” when compared to placebo. Also important: both companies reported that the efficacy of the vaccine was consistent across age, race and ethnicity, and gender demographics.

Based on the data that we currently have, the Pfizer trial reported 10 cases of severe COVID-19 infection among the study participants. Nearly all of those cases – nine out of 10 – were among the study participants who received a placebo instead of the actual drug. The remaining case (1) occurred in a study participant who received the vaccine.

In the Moderna trial, 30 cases of severe COVID-19 disease developed and all of them were among the placebo group. This means that no cases of severe COVID-19 infection occurred among the group that received the vaccine.

How many injections of the vaccine will someone require?

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two injections. For Pfizer, the vaccines will be given 21 days apart. For Moderna, it is 28 days. Other vaccines in development may only require a single injection; time will tell.

Who has the authority to approve vaccines for distribution?

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is reviewing all the available data on the vaccines. We anticipate the review will be complete on Thursday, Dec. 10 for the Pfizer vaccine and Tuesday, Dec. 17 for the Moderna vaccine.

Reportedly, the evaluation will be available for viewing livestream – allowing the public, and particularly infectious disease experts, to learn additional details about the studies. The vaccines will likely be made available to health systems – Virtua included – very shortly afterward on an emergency-use basis.

The federal government will oversee a centralized process for ordering, distributing, and tracking COVID-19 vaccines in the United States. This will involve the Centers for Disease Control as well as the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense. Other countries are following their own processes.

Plain and simple: Should I get vaccinated?

Vaccination appears to provide protection from COVID-19 infection in more than 90 percent of study participants in the Pfizer and Moderna trials. These studies included more than 40,000 and 30,000 participants, respectively. Furthermore, those who have underlying illness, such as diabetes, obesity, or chronic kidney disease – who are at higher risk to advance to more severe COVID illness – show protection as well. There was only one presentation of a severe case of infection that developed in the Pfizer trial and none in the Moderna trial, giving much optimism. Further information will be released at the FDA evaluation.

Consider the following questions regarding the vaccines:

- What is my risk of developing infection?
- What is the likelihood of the infection becoming severe?
- What are my potential exposures as a healthcare provider? What are the potential exposures for/from the other members of my household?
- What impact would it have on my family if I developed infection?

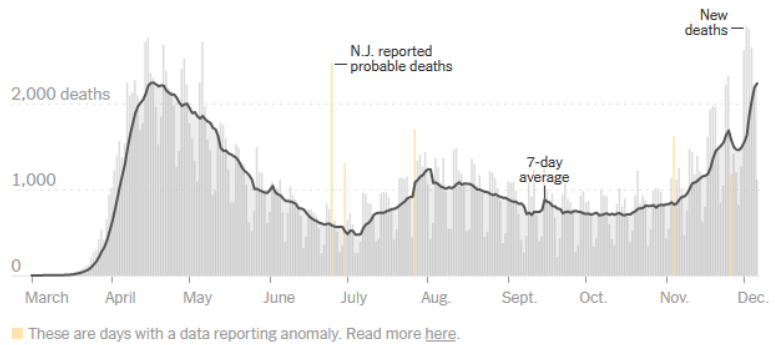
Balance that as to what is the downside of the vaccine in terms of safety as to whether that would stop or prevent you from vaccinating.

Bear in mind: Infection is pervasive in the community, so exposure potential is significant both at work and in the community. On December 6, the State of New Jersey reported 6,046 new COVID cases in one day! More than 600 of those cases require critical care, and, sadly, 54 people died within a 24-hour window because of COVID infections.

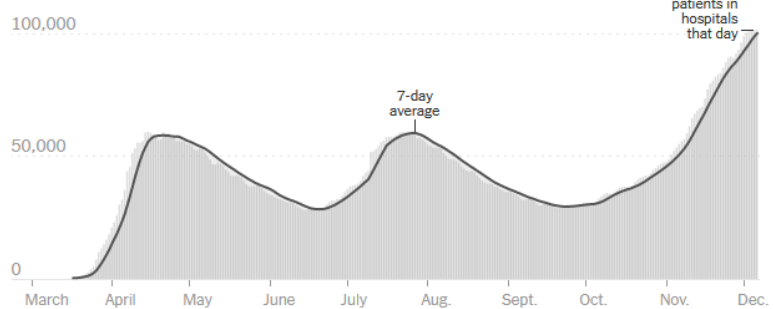
As to safety?

The mRNA vaccines of Pfizer and Moderna **do not** have live virus. Yes, some reactions to the injection can occur – including pain at the site, fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, chills, and fever – but this resolves within a few days. Some would say these undesired reactions indicate the response of your immune system. To this point, no significant safety events or longer term reactions have been reported to the public in association with either vaccine candidate. Further information will be reviewed and released at the FDA meetings, which are open to the public via livestream. Pfizer studies will be posted to the FDA website on December 8.

New reported deaths by day



Hospitalized Covid-19 patients by day



Source: Hospitalization data from the Covid Tracking Project. - Currently hospitalized is the number of patients with Covid-19 reported by states to be in a hospital on that day. Dips and spikes could be due to inconsistent reporting by hospitals.

Coronavirus in the U.S., New York Times

The more data-points you have, the more confident you can feel about your decisions.

How can I find more information about the vaccine?

As stated above, there will be a great opportunity for the public to view the FDA hearings as livestream events. The purpose of these events is to provide transparency and full disclosure for those who are inclined to participate. Excellent summaries on the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are also available on the Wall Street Journal website, although you may need a subscription to access the information.

- Wall Street Journal Summaries for [Moderna](#) and [Pfizer](#) vaccines

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also prepared fact sheets on vaccine safety and related topics. Each of them is available in a print-friendly format and in five different languages, including Spanish. To change the language, click the tab toward the top of each webpage.

- [Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine](#)

- [8 Things to Know about Vaccine Planning](#)
- [Understanding How COVID-19 Vaccines Work](#)

Are *you* going to get the vaccine?

Yes. As health care providers, we recognize that we have a heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19. Because of this, each of us intends to take advantage of this opportunity that will most likely protect ourselves from getting sick and from potentially passing on the virus to our family, colleagues, and patients. This is not a hastily made decision; rather, it is the result of reviewing the data, assessing the risk, safety and recognizing the role that vaccines have played in eradicating other diseases in the past.

Information regarding COVID-19 vaccines is constantly evolving. Please revisit this page often as it will regularly be revised and update.