COVID-19 Vaccines

What You Need to Know

Memorial HEALTH SYSTEM

Why is it important to get vaccinated against COVID-19?

- Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is the best step you can take to protect yourself and the people around you. The more people who choose to get vaccinated for COVID-19, the safer our communities will be for everyone. Allowing COVID-19 to continue to spread at its current transmission rate is not sustainable for our physical health, mental health, the healthcare system or the country as a whole.

How do we know the vaccine is safe?

- All vaccines undergo a more rigorous review process than any other type of pharmaceutical. Before a vaccine becomes available for use, there is very thorough development and testing. To prove their safety, there are multiple rounds of clinical trials starting with small groups of volunteers and eventually including tens of thousands of participants. Once those trials are completed, the FDA (U.S. Food & Drug Administration) reviews the data and approves it based on the recommendations of an independent board of scientists and clinical experts, the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee. Then, a separate group at the CDC, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), determines who should receive the vaccine.
- You may have heard that the COVID-19 vaccines were developed more quickly than the average vaccine. This was possible, in part, because two time-consuming administrative steps were able to be eliminated. Most vaccines that are developed go through initial efforts to determine whether there is a widespread need and to secure funding for development and clinical trials. Because the need for this vaccine was clear and funding was in place, these first steps could be skipped and researchers could start developing the vaccines immediately.

Why do you need two doses of some COVID-19 vaccines?

- The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses approximately 3–4 weeks apart. Multiple doses allow the body to produce more antibodies to protect you against COVID-19.

What are the side effects of getting COVID-19 vaccination? Will vaccination give me COVID-19?

- The side effects of COVID-19 vaccination are similar to what you may have experienced from other immunizations—fever, fatigue, headache, muscle pain and joint pain. For the vast majority of people, these side effects are mild and will resolve within 24–36 hours. These side effects do not mean that you have COVID-19. They are a sign that the vaccine is working and your immune system is learning to fight COVID-19. The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 as there is no live or inactive virus in the COVID-19 vaccine you are receiving.

If I already had COVID-19, should I get vaccinated?

- COVID-19 is a new illness and as a result we do not know how long immunity lasts. For this reason, it is recommended that you get the COVID-19 vaccine even if you've already recovered from COVID-19 in order to boost your immune response should you be exposed to COVID-19 in the future. You can be vaccinated as long as you have been cleared from your quarantine period.

If I have allergies, should I get vaccinated for COVID-19?

- If you have allergies to foods, environmental factors, animals, etc., you should still get the COVID-19 vaccine. The only precaution at this point is for recipients who have a history of a severe anaphylaxis reaction to injectable medications/other vaccines. Vaccine clinics will be equipped with emergency response equipment and protocols to ensure the safety of all recipients.

Does vaccination treat COVID-19?

- Vaccination is a way to prevent COVID-19 illness. It is not a treatment for COVID-19. To learn more about the latest treatments for COVID-19, visit FDA.gov.

If I am pregnant or breastfeeding, should I get vaccinated for COVID-19?

- Pregnant and breastfeeding women should consult with their obstetricians and pediatricians about whether to get the vaccine. Pregnant women should consider their risk of contracting COVID-19 during pregnancy. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) advises that COVID-19 vaccines should not be withheld from pregnant individuals who meet criteria for vaccination based on ACIP-recommended priority groups.

  ACOG also advises that COVID-19 vaccines should be offered to lactating individuals similar to non-lactating individuals when they meet criteria for receipt of the vaccine based on prioritization groups outlined by the ACIP. Read more from ACOG at www.acog.org/en/clinical/clinical-guidance/practice-advisory/articles/2020/12/Vaccinating-Pregnant-and-Lactating-Patients-Against-COVID-19.

  Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics provides the following guidance: While these vaccines were not specifically tested in breastfeeding women, it is not likely (based on the mechanisms of action of the vaccines in U.S. trials) that there would be any risk to the child.

Is there a microchip in the COVID-19 vaccine?

- No, vaccines do not contain microchips.

What happens if enough people don't get the COVID-19 vaccination?

- Widespread vaccination is the safest path to herd immunity. For COVID-19, herd immunity occurs when approximately 75% of people in a population are immune to the disease either because they have gotten ill and then recovered or because they have received a vaccine. Scientists are still learning how long immunity from either of these methods lasts but at least temporary immunity has been validated in initial studies. As more time passes, we will know with more certainty how long the immunity achieved from either having contracted COVID-19 or being vaccinated lasts.
- Some people have suggested that herd immunity could happen over time without the creation of a vaccine for COVID-19. However, relying on this very uncertain strategy (with unknown immunity periods for people who have been COVID-19-positive) to create herd immunity would take years to achieve, considering the U.S. population is estimated at over 320 million. In that time, the significant threat to the capacity of healthcare facilities and the potential of serious illness or deaths of many people here in central Illinois and nationwide would continue.

  A vaccine offers the safest, most rapid and most effective route to herd immunity. However, experts warn that this doesn't mean we can immediately throw out our masks once we've gotten the vaccination. We will need to continue mitigation measures such as practicing social distancing and wearing masks while the vaccination process is ongoing over the next several months. Once herd immunity takes hold, these measures can gradually be discontinued.