

COVID-19 Vaccine

Frequently Asked Questions

1) How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine?

There are multiple COVID vaccines at various stages of the development, approval and distribution process. The clinical trials for the Pfizer vaccine showed a 95% efficacy rate and 94% with the Moderna vaccine in preventing symptomatic COVID. That means the rate of catching COVID in vaccinated participants was only 5-6% of the rate seen in those who received placebo. There is still a small chance of infection post-vaccination. Masks and social distancing will be with us for some time to come.

Research is still being done to measure the impact on transmission—whether someone vaccinated can pass the infection on to someone else. Virtually all other vaccines both protect against getting the disease and reducing transmission, and it is our hope that these vaccines follow that pattern. As with other vaccines, the more people who get immunized, the greater the community-wide protection against the disease.

The Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine—authorized for use as a single dose rather than two doses—has been shown in clinical trials including over 40,000 subjects to have a 66% efficacy rate in preventing symptomatic COVID. It has a 93% efficacy rate in preventing hospitalization >14 days after vaccination. No hospitalizations occurred in vaccinated subjects >28 days after vaccination. Seven COVID-related deaths occurred in the placebo group and none in the vaccinated group. This means that those who are vaccinated, if they do get COVID, are extremely unlikely to get a severe enough illness to require hospitalization or become fatal.

2) Is the vaccine safe?

While the COVID vaccine is new, the clinical trials and vetting vaccines go through are not. The speed of the vaccine development process may make people wary, but there have been multiple layers of safety and quality assurance. As was the case for other vaccines in the past, oversight and review of the COVID vaccine authorization process by the FDA and CDC was led by panels of independent experts. Washington was also a member of the Western States Pact, which created the Scientific Safety Review Workgroup for another layer of scrutiny and expert review to this process. Learn more at www.snohd.org/covidvaccine.

3) What are the side effects from the vaccine?

Side effects that have been reported with the COVID-19 vaccine include:

- Pain, redness or swelling at the site of injection
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle or joint pain
- Chills
- Nausea
- Swollen lymph nodes

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For the two-dose vaccines (Moderna and Pfizer), one or more of these side effects are to be expected in up to 1-in-4 people after the first dose and 1-in-2 after the second dose. They generally occur the day after vaccination and are normal signs that the vaccine is working. You can take fever or pain relievers like acetaminophen or ibuprofen if needed or apply a cool compress to the injection site. Contact your healthcare provider if you are concerned or if the symptoms don't go away within two days (48 hours).

About half of those receiving the Janssen vaccine experience one or more of the side effects listed above.

4) What adverse reactions were reported for the vaccine?

There is a remote chance that the vaccine could cause a treatable but severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This was not observed during the clinical trials, but has been observed very rarely following the first doses of Pfizer (11 per million) and Moderna (2.5 per million). This is similar to the rate of anaphylaxis for other vaccines. Anaphylaxis usually occurs within 30 minutes after getting a dose of the vaccine and most persons with anaphylaxis have a prior history of allergies or allergic reactions, including some with previous anaphylaxis events;

Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include:

- difficulty breathing
- swelling of your face and throat
- a fast heartbeat
- itching
- hives
- dizziness and weakness.

Prior allergy or anaphylaxis is not a reason to avoid vaccination, though. Only allergy to the COVID vaccines themselves or their ingredients are a reason to not get vaccinated. Vaccination sites are prepared to handle this reaction and observe patients for an appropriate period of time before releasing them. If you have a history of anaphylaxis and are concerned about getting the COVID vaccine, discuss this concern with your health care provider.

If you have a severe allergic reaction, and are not still at the vaccine clinic, seek medical attention or call 911 immediately. The CDC has also created V-safe, a platform for people to share information on their side effects and reactions. All vaccine recipients are encouraged to sign up for this system to provide additional information about the vaccine's side effects as vaccination is implemented. Learn more at www.cdc.gov/vsafe.

5) Will the vaccine give me COVID?

No. The vaccine does not contain SARS-CoV-2 and cannot give you COVID-19.

6) How many doses do I need?

There will likely be multiple potential COVID vaccines rolling out within the next year, so be sure to check with your medical provider on the vaccine for specific instructions. The Pfizer vaccine requires two (2) doses, with the second dose given at least 21 days after the first one. The Moderna vaccine also requires

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two (2) doses, with the second dose given 28 days after the first one. It's important to make sure you get both doses of the same vaccine brand in order for the vaccine to be most effective.

The Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine is a single dose.

7) Who will get the vaccine first?

Vaccines are being given out in planned phases, focused on vaccinating those at highest risk first. Information on who is currently eligible under the phased approach is updated at <http://bit.ly/snocovaccine>, and [a PhaseFinder tool](#) is available online to help people identify whether they are yet eligible.

8) How were the phases decided? Can I get vaccinated sooner?

Snohomish County's framework for the phased approach to COVID-19 vaccination is aligned with the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). It is important that the framework is consistent across the state and between counties to ensure that the roll-out of the vaccine is efficient, understandable, and equitable.

While we have received inquiries from organizations, employers or individuals that are interested in being vaccinated earlier in the framework, we do not anticipate adjusting the phases locally in such a way that they would vary from what is adopted by the state Department of Health..

9) How do I know if a message or email offering vaccination options is legitimate?

There are, unfortunately, already scams circulating related to COVID-19 vaccine. Know how to spot vaccine scams. Remember that there are no pre-payments required to "get in line" for vaccination, you cannot pay for early access, vaccines are not available for purchase online, and vaccines must be administered by licensed medical professionals. Turn to your doctor, clinic, or other reliable sources if you are uncertain whether a message or email about COVID vaccine is legitimate. If you receive a vaccination-related communication from someone other than your health care provider, health insurance provider, or employer, you have reason to be suspicious.

You can check back at www.snohd.org/covidvaccine for additional tools to find reliable vaccination options in Snohomish County. These will be added as they become available. You can also reach the Snohomish Health District COVID call center at 425-339-5278 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on weekdays.

10) When will I get vaccinated?

Exact timing of vaccination phases is not known, but information will continue to be updated at

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<http://bit.ly/snocovaccine>. Because vaccine availability is limited and many people who are eligible want to get vaccinated, it may be difficult to get an appointment right away, even if you are in the current phase. Please be sure to check with your healthcare provider, clinic or pharmacy, or you can learn more about mass vaccination sites in Snohomish County at the web address above. Above all, be patient and keep trying. We are committed to everyone who wants to get vaccinated doing so; it might just take a while.

11) Who should get the vaccine?

The FDA has authorized the Pfizer vaccine for individuals 16 years of age or older, and the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccine for those 18 years of age or older. Tell your vaccine provider about all of your medical conditions. You should not get the vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction after a previous dose of the same vaccine or a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient of this vaccine.

12) If I had COVID, should I still get vaccinated?

Yes, when you are eligible to get the vaccine, it is recommended that you do so. We are still learning about COVID. While reinfection appears to be rare so far, it is possible to get COVID more than once. If you currently have COVID, wait until after your isolation period is done to get vaccinated. Talk with your healthcare provider for additional guidance.

13) Do I get to choose which vaccine I get?

Right now, only the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines have been authorized for distribution. There may be a vaccine that is more appropriate for you than another. We encourage you to talk with your healthcare provider to know what is recommended for your circumstances.

In general, the best vaccine is the one you are able to get. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) does not state a product preference; people may receive any ACIP-recommended COVID-19 vaccine and are encouraged to receive the earliest vaccine available to them.

All of the vaccines that have been authorized are shown to be safe and effective in multiple rounds of clinical trials. While you do have the option to watch for availability of the vaccine you want to get, it is best not to wait if another vaccine brand is available sooner, unless you have talked to your doctor and there is a medical reason to avoid a certain brand of vaccine.

14) Once I get the vaccine, can I stop wearing a mask?

The vaccine looks to be very effective, but it's not perfect. Even after you are vaccinated, you will need to avoid gatherings, wear a face covering and keep your distance when around people outside your household. This isn't forever, just for now.

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15) How soon can we get back to pre-pandemic activities?

The COVID vaccine is a big step on the path out of this pandemic, but it is not an instant solution. If all goes smoothly, it will likely take 9-12 months to fully vaccinate most of the population. We are now a couple of months into that, with more to go. That's another 9-12 months of fighting COVID with the same measures we're relying on now. Wear a mask. Avoid gatherings. Stay home if you're sick. Keep your distance and wash your hands. We can't let our guard down until public health and medical professionals agree it is safe to do so.

16) How does the vaccine work?

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are messenger RNA vaccines, also known as mRNA vaccines. These are a new type of vaccine to protect against infectious diseases, but they have been known and researched for decades. To trigger an immune response, many vaccines put a weakened or inactivated germ into our bodies. Not mRNA vaccines. Instead, they teach our cells how to make a protein from the virus—or even just a piece of that protein—that triggers an immune response inside our bodies. That immune response, which produces antibodies, is what protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies later.

The Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine is similar to mRNA vaccines. They all use a piece of the virus' genetic code for a piece of the virus' outer shell. After getting vaccinated, the muscle cells make that piece of the virus, then our immune systems react to that and remember it for the future if we get exposed, killing the invading virus and stopping the infection. With the Janssen vaccine, however, that piece of the virus' genetic code is inserted into an adenovirus (think common cold) that has been modified so that it cannot replicate and cannot make you sick. Our cells open up the adenovirus, make the piece of the virus' outer shell, and the process continues as described above. The benefit of this adenovirus vector is that it permits for easier storage and handling of the vaccine because it does not have to be stored frozen like the mRNA vaccines.

17) Does the vaccine change my DNA or implant a chip?

No. They do not affect or interact with our DNA in any way, and no microchip is present. The genetic code of the coronavirus never enters the nucleus of the cell, which is where our DNA (genetic material) is kept. The cell breaks down and gets rid of the foreign virus' code soon after it is finished using the instructions.

18) What is in the vaccine?

You may see some rumors about ingredients listed online or in social media. These are generally myths. The [ingredients in the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines](#) are pretty typical for a vaccine, as are the ingredients in the [Johnson & Johnson vaccine](#). They contain the active ingredient of mRNA or adenovirus along with other ingredients like fat, salts, and sugars that protect the active ingredient,

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help them work better in the body, and protect the vaccine during storage.