

# Frequently Asked Questions About the COVID-19 Vaccine



## **What are the benefits of getting the vaccine?**

The COVID-19 vaccines are designed to teach your immune system to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. Clinical trials demonstrated that the currently available vaccines are safe and effective at protecting you from COVID-19. Based on the data from early clinical trials, and experience from vaccines for other diseases, it is likely the currently available vaccines limit the severity of the disease should you contract the virus. We are learning more about the potential for COVID-19 vaccination to reduce transmission rates in communities. The CDC does not yet know what percentage of people would need to get vaccinated to achieve herd immunity to COVID-19.

## **Who should get the vaccine?**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the Pfizer vaccine for anyone over the age of 16 years old and the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, or Janssen, vaccines are approved for anyone over the age of 18 years old. You should consult your primary care provider if you have had severe allergic reactions to any of the components of these vaccines or severe allergic reaction to vaccines in the past. If you experience a severe allergic reaction to the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine contact your health care provider or vaccine provider to determine if you should take the second dose.

## **Is the vaccine safe?**

The vaccines currently available have been found to be safe and effective after robust review. The vetting and safety process a vaccine goes through is not new. Safety and efficacy data were collected when the vaccines were in clinical trials. The Food and Drug Agency reviewed the data on safety and efficacy and issued an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). The CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices also reviews this data and makes recommendations on vaccine use and populations to be offered vaccine first.

Washington State joined the Western States Scientific Safety Review Workgroup as an additional layer of expert review and scrutiny. The workgroup, made up of nationally acclaimed scientists with expertise in immunization and public health, has concurrently and independently reviewed the FDA's actions related to COVID-19 vaccinations. The FDA, CDC and Western States Scientific Safety Review Workgroup approved the Pfizer vaccine for people over the age of 16 years and the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, or Janssen, vaccines for people over the age of 18 years.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the CDC will continue to collect data and monitor the vaccines for adverse events.

## **How do the COVID-19 vaccines differ from each other?**

There are a few key differences:

- The Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) vaccine requires only one dose (Pfizer and Moderna require two doses)

- The J&J vaccine is a vector vaccine (Pfizer and Moderna are both [mRNA vaccines](#))
- The J&J vaccine can be shipped through regular shipping methods and stored at refrigerated temperatures for three months. (Moderna and Pfizer must be shipped and stored at extremely low temperatures)

While the vaccines differ from one another, they share an important commonality. Each of the COVID-19 vaccines is effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

### **How effective are the COVID-19 vaccines?**

All three available vaccines are safe and highly effective at preventing moderate to severe cases of COVID-19, hospitalizations, and death. The Pfizer vaccine is 95% effective and the Moderna vaccine is 94% effective overall at preventing COVID-19. Among clinical trial participants, the two vaccines were approximately 67% effective in preventing moderate to severe COVID-19 disease occurring at least 14 days after vaccination and 66% effective in preventing moderate to severe disease at least 28 days after vaccination.

Overall, among clinical trial participants, the Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) vaccine was approximately 67% effective in preventing moderate to severe COVID-19 disease occurring at least 14 days after vaccination and 66% effective in preventing moderate to severe disease at least 28 days after vaccination.

Additionally, the vaccine was approximately 77% effective in preventing severe COVID-19 occurring at least 14 days after vaccination and 85% effective in preventing severe COVID-19 occurring at least 28 days after vaccination.

### **What are the most common side effects from the vaccine?**

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports the most common side effects of the vaccines are:

- Pain at the injection site
- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches

These side effects are common after receiving the injection and are an indication the body is mounting an immune response to the vaccine. Contact your primary care provider if the redness or tenderness at the injection site increases 24 hours after receiving the vaccine, if these symptoms last longer than 72 hours, or if your symptoms are severe or worsening. The currently available vaccines require two shots in order to provide full protection. You should still get your second dose even if you had side effects

after the first shot unless your vaccine provider or your doctor have advised you not to get the second dose.

### **Will the vaccine give me COVID-19?**

No, none of the approved vaccines contain the SARS-CoV-2 virus so you can't get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

### **How many doses do I need?**

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses. The Pfizer vaccine requires the second dose 17-21 days after the first dose. The Moderna vaccine requires the second dose 28 days after the first dose. These vaccines are not interchangeable and both doses should be given with the same product. We don't yet know if mixed-product vaccination series is safe or effective. The Johnson & Johnson, or Janssen vaccine requires only one dose.

Your body will then require an additional few weeks to generate infection fighting cells in sufficient quantity. For more information on how a vaccine works in your body, please watch this [video](#).

### **How does the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine work?**

Many vaccines use a weakened or inactivated form of the target pathogen to trigger an immune response. Viral vector vaccines use a different virus as a vector instead, which delivers important instructions (in the form of a gene) to our cells. For COVID-19 vaccines, a modified virus delivers a gene that instructs our cells to make a SARS-CoV-2 antigen called the spike protein. This antigen triggers production of antibodies and a resulting immune response. The virus used in a viral vector vaccine poses no threat of causing illness in humans because it has been modified or, in some cases, because the type of virus used as the vector cannot cause disease in humans. Learn more at [Understanding and Explaining Viral Vector COVID-19 Vaccines](#).

### **Who will get the vaccine first?**

Washington State implemented a phased plan for vaccine distribution. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) outlined a four-phased approach for COVID-19 vaccine distribution in our state based on the [National Academy of Medicine Framework for Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine](#). Thurston County will follow the phased plan outlined by the DOH.

Health care providers in Thurston County are vaccinating individuals in accordance with categories outlined in the [WA State COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Guidance Phase](#). Beginning April 15, all Washington State residents will be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine.

### **Can I get vaccinated sooner? When will I get the vaccine?**

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services (PHSS) is following the phased approach for the COVID-19 vaccine and is aligned with the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) framework. PHSS will not be deviating from the framework provide by the DOH and PHSS will distribute its share of the vaccine in a fair and equitable manner to each group. Please be patient as the supply is limited. PHSS

will post more information about which individuals are eligible to receive the vaccine on our COVID-19 website as the phases progress.

Weekly, the DOH receives vaccines from the federal government based on our statewide population and allocates those vaccines to approved providers. It is unknown how much vaccine will be allocated to providers within Thurston County each week. The demand for the vaccine in Thurston County outweighs the current weekly allocations we receive from the DOH.

In time everyone who wants COVID-19 vaccine will be able to get the vaccine.

### **If I already had COVID-19, should I get the vaccine?**

Data from clinical trials have shown that the currently available vaccines are safe when given to people who have already had COVID-19. There is no recommended minimum time between infection and receiving vaccine although there is data to show that risk of reinfection is lower in the first 90 days after infection. It is recommended that you get vaccine even if you have had COVID-19. If you currently have COVID-19 wait until you are no longer infectious before seeking vaccine.

### **Do I get to choose which vaccine I get?**

Right now, the supply of the COVID-19 vaccine is limited. When you are eligible to receive the vaccine, please talk to your primary care provider to determine what they recommend for you based on your specific circumstances.

### **How does the vaccine work?**

This can be a complex question to answer, so here is a [link](#) to CDC's resources on understanding the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines. Here is a [link](#) to CDC's resources on understanding viral vector vaccines.

### **What is in the vaccine?**

The ingredients in both the [Pfizer vaccine](#) and [Moderna vaccine](#) are pretty typical for vaccines. They contain the active ingredient of mRNA along with other ingredients like fat, salts, and sugars that protect the active ingredient, help it work better in the body, and protect the vaccine during freezing. You may see some rumors and untrue ingredients listed online or in social media. These are generally myths. See this [Q&A webpage from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia](#) for more information about ingredients.

### **Will I be required to get the vaccine? For work? For school?**

It will be your choice to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The Washington State Board of Health decides what vaccines to require for schools. Right now, the state has no plans to make this vaccine mandatory. Employers could require you to get the vaccine because they set their own policies regarding employee health requirements.

### **Will I still have to wear a mask and social distance if I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Yes, even if you get vaccinated, you will still need to practice preventative measures to prevent the spread of disease. These measures include:

- Wearing a mask
- Stay at least six feet apart from people not in your household

- Wash your hands frequently
- Limit gatherings and keep them small
- Stay home if you are sick

While experts continue to learn more about the COVID-19 vaccines, everyone must continue to do their part and use the preventative measures to fight this pandemic. Continued research is needed to understand the protection the COVID-19 vaccine provides before deciding to change the recommendations on steps everyone should take to slow the spread of COVID-19.

**I'm eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine based on the current phase and tier. Why am I not able to get a vaccine?**

Currently, in the State of Washington there is not enough vaccine supply to meet the demand.

Weekly, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) receives vaccines from the federal government based on our statewide population and allocates those vaccines to approved providers. It is unknown how much vaccine will be allocated to providers within Thurston County each week.

The quantity of vaccines received drives the number of residents vaccinated and the number of appointments that are available. This is very frustrating to eligible residents who want the vaccine and cannot find an appointment as well as providers who want to give the vaccine as quickly and effectively as possible.

**How do I get a COVID-19 vaccine when I'm eligible?**

Currently, vaccinations are by appointment only. You can confirm your eligibility for the vaccine [by visiting by calling the Washington State Department of Health at 888-856-5816](#). Vaccine doses are very limited, so appointments are not guaranteed. Each provider in Thurston County who offers vaccines has a different scheduling process.

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services will announce the availability of open clinics and mass vaccination sites as they become available on social media and our website. Residents who have questions or need help may also call 360-867-2610 for more information.

**Are there any public vaccination sites?**

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services (PHSS) is working with many community partners to conduct large scale community vaccination sites in Thurston County. Current community sites are South Puget Sound Community College and Thurston County Fairgrounds. The days and hours of operation are based on vaccine supply and will be announced on our vaccine web page and social media sites.

**I am not a Thurston County resident, but I'm eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine. Can I get vaccinated in Thurston County?**

Yes, you are not required to work or live in Thurston County to receive a vaccination from an approved vaccine provider in Thurston County.

**I don't have access to the internet, so I can't check phase finder or make an appointment online. How can I get help?**

If a Thurston County resident does not have internet (email) access, residents can call the Washington State Department of Health vaccine phone line at 888-856-5816 to receive assistance with making vaccine appointments as they become available and a Spanish option is also available.

If you are unable to reach DOH through their vaccine line, you may call Thurston County Public Health and Social Services (PHSS) at 360-867-2610 for assistance. Due to the high call volume DOH and PHSS are experiencing, please be patient if you are unable to receive immediate assistance. If you do have access to email, internet, or cell phone service, please use those methods in scheduling appointments before calling DOH or PHSS.

### **Is there a vaccine waiting list? Can I get on it?**

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services (PHSS) is not able to maintain a COVID-19 vaccine waiting list for the public at this time. This is due in part to a very limited vaccine supply week-to-week and a high demand for vaccine appointments. PHSS is one of several health care providers in Washington State registered to administer the COVID-19 vaccine. Each provider in Thurston County who offers vaccines has a different scheduling process. The best way to find an appointment for the vaccine is to navigate to the state Department of Health's vaccination locations website: <https://vaccinelocator.doh.wa.gov/>.

### **Why am I finding out about vaccination events after the fact? How do I register for them?**

Each registered vaccine provider in Thurston County has different policies and procedures for how they choose to release their vaccine appointment information to the public. Thurston County Public Health and Social Services (PHSS) utilizes a combination of "open pod" and "closed pod" vaccination events in order to equitably distribute the vaccine to residents in Thurston County.

Open pod clinics are appointment-based, first come, first served events. When PHSS announces these types of clinics, it is generally through the PHSS website, Facebook, and Twitter channels an hour prior to opening registration for the clinic. Unfortunately, due to high demand for appointments and limited vaccine supply, appointments can fill up very quickly.

PHSS uses closed pod clinics to distribute the vaccine more equitably to those in Thurston County without internet access, non-English-speaking communities, homebound individuals, and those without consistent access to services. To execute these clinics, PHSS generally partners with a local organization or non-profit to reserve slots for underserved members of our community. These closed pod events are not announced to the public.

Weekly vaccine allocations are the main driver for how many appointment slots PHSS has at any given event, as all health care providers strive to use 100% of the vaccine doses allocated each week.

### **How do I get my second dose of vaccine?**

The health care provider who administered your first vaccine dose will receive the allocation from the Washington State Department of Health for your second dose. You should make every effort to get your second dose from the same provider you received your first dose. Because every health care provider handles second dose appointments differently, please contact the facility where you received your first dose of the vaccine to schedule your second dose appointment.

## **How do I schedule a second vaccine dose for a clinic held by Thurston County Public Health and Social Services?**

PHSS will email you a registration link to schedule your second dose appointment approximately 2-4 days before the second dose clinic. Please do not share your appointment link with anyone else, as it is unique to you.

Second doses of Moderna will be four weeks (28 days) from the date of your first shot. Second doses of Pfizer will be three weeks (21 days) from the date of your first shot. You will receive your second dose at the same location you received your first dose.

If you do not have an email account, someone will call you to make an appointment. You can sign up at any open clinic to receive your second vaccine - just make sure you get one by the same manufacturer (Moderna or Pfizer) as your first dose. You should get your second shot as close to the recommended 3-week or 4-week interval as possible. However, your second dose may be given up to 6 weeks (42 days) after the first dose, if necessary. You should not get the second dose early. There is currently limited information on the effectiveness of receiving your second shot earlier than recommended or later than 6 weeks after the first shot.

You can call PHSS at 360-867-2610 if you are unable to locate your email registration to confirm your second dose appointment date and time.

## **I can't get my second dose of the vaccine 21 days (for Pfizer) or 28 days (for Moderna) after my first dose. What should I do?**

According to the CDC, if you are not able to receive your second dose exactly on the 21<sup>st</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> day, as recommended for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines respectively, you can receive your second COVID-19 vaccine up to six weeks after your first dose and expect the same immune protection as if you had received your shot within the 21<sup>st</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> day. At this time, individuals must complete the vaccination series with the same vaccine since the safety and efficacy of mixed dosing has not yet been confirmed.

## **What is a vaccination card and what should I do with it?**

When you get a vaccination, you should receive a vaccination record card. This card is not only proof that you got your shot, but it can also help you keep track of your vaccine information. This information is important to ensure you get the correct second dose — at the right time.

Your vaccine record card will tell you:

- Which type of vaccine you received (Pfizer, Moderna, or Johnson & Johnson)
- When you got your first dose
- When to go back for your second dose (if needed)
- Your vaccine provider's name or clinic site

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has an immunization registry known as [My Immunization Registry](#) (MyIR). If you lose your record card, you can log in to view your vaccination records. If you need to sign up for an account, you can sign up [here](#).