

COVID-19 Vaccine Questions and Answers (Q&A) for Fenway Health Patients

Fenway Health is preparing for the delivery and administration of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

Below is a list of questions and answers (Q&A) for patients. Fenway Health will be updating this content and adding new Q&As to the list regularly. Please check online for the most up to date list at fenwayhealth.org/covid-19-vaccines.

What is the COVID-19 vaccine(s)?

The COVID-19 vaccine is a shot that teaches the immune system to recognize and fight the coronavirus. The FDA has approved both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines for emergency use authorization. Both vaccines are classified as “messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines.” Additionally, there are other COVID-19 vaccines in development. Each vaccine helps the human body develop immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19 without having to get the illness. The COVID-19 vaccine teaches the immune system to recognize the coronavirus. When people get the vaccine, their immune system makes antibodies that stay in their blood and protects them if they are exposed to the virus.

Is the vaccine safe?

The FDA has found the vaccines to be safe. We understand that there may be concern over the safety and efficacy of a COVID-19 vaccine. The FDA is required to make decisions that are guided by science and data regarding authorization or approval of COVID-19 vaccines. We have closely examined the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) process for evaluating the many different vaccine trials. We have confidence in the FDA’s approval process and are committed to safety, quality, and high reliability. You cannot develop COVID-19 from this vaccine.

How will Fenway Health determine who gets the vaccine?

Fenway Health is following guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Health (MDPH) for vaccine distribution. The goal of this guidance is to protect the residents of the Commonwealth through the safe and efficient administration of a COVID-19 vaccine. The MDPH’s guidance is based on the recommendations of the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the Massachusetts COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee; and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and vaccine manufacturers. **To see when you might be able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, visit mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine-in-massachusetts.**

Why should I get the vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccination helps you avoid severe illness from COVID-19. While many people with COVID-19 have only a mild illness, others may get a severe illness or may even die. There is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you, even if you are not at increased risk of severe complications. If you get COVID-19, you may spread the disease to family, friends and others without knowing it. COVID-19 vaccination helps protect you by creating an antibody response without having to experience illness. Learn more at cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/how-they-work.html.

Will the vaccine protect me from getting COVID-19 or just make me less likely to become very sick?

In clinical trials, the vaccine proved to be highly effective at preventing COVID-19 infection. It is not yet clear if the vaccine reduces the risk of developing both symptomatic and asymptomatic infection or just prevents symptomatic infection.

Can someone who has had COVID-19 get the vaccine? Should they?

Yes and yes. There is not enough information currently available to say if, or for how long after infection, someone is protected from getting COVID-19 again. Eligible patients who had proven COVID-19 (or may have had) can and should receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Testing for antibodies to COVID-19 as a marker of past infection is not recommended prior to vaccination. **Please note:** Persons who have active COVID-19 infection should not be vaccinated.

Are there any contraindications to immunosuppressed people receiving the vaccine?

Immunocompromised persons, including individuals receiving immunosuppressant therapy, may have a diminished immune response to the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine.

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What are the known side effects of the Moderna vaccine?

Side effects are similar to post-vaccination symptoms that are common with other vaccines. Side effects may occur after receiving either of the two available COVID-19 vaccines, especially after the second dose.

Reported side effects for the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine include:

- Injection site reactions: pain, tenderness and swelling of the lymph nodes in the same arm of the injection, swelling (hardness), and redness
- General side effects: fatigue, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, chills, nausea and vomiting, and fever
- Severe Allergic Reactions: There is a remote chance that the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine could cause a severe allergic reaction. A severe allergic reaction would usually occur within a few minutes to one hour after receiving the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine.
- **Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include:**
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Swelling of your face and throat
 - A fast heartbeat
 - A bad rash all over your body
 - Dizziness and weakness
- The vaccine is still being studied and other serious and unexpected side effects may occur.

Does the Vaccine Impact Reproductive Health/Pregnant People?

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, discuss your options with your healthcare provider.

- **Pregnant People:** Observational data demonstrates that, while the chances for severe health effects are low, pregnant people with COVID-19 have an increased risk of severe illness, including illness that results in ICU admission, mechanical ventilation, and death compared with non-pregnant people of reproductive age.
- **Birth Defects/Impacts on Fetus:** There is no data regarding potential birth defects at this point.
- **Breastfeeding:** There is no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in lactating people or on the effects of mRNA vaccines on the breastfed infant or on milk production/excretion. However, mRNA vaccines are not thought to be a risk to the breastfeeding infant.
- **Fertility:** There have been no studies conducted regarding the Moderna vaccine and fertility.

Is there a risk of developing Bell's palsy?

During Moderna's clinical trials and follow-up period, there were three reports of Bell's palsy (facial paralysis) in the test group. All three patients were noted as having preexisting conditions that may have played a role in the development of facial paralysis. There is not sufficient information to determine a causal relationship with the vaccine. The FDA recommends monitoring for cases of Bell's palsy.

Following vaccination, can you still get COVID-19 and will you still be contagious?

- In an ongoing clinical trial, the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine has been shown to be approximately 95% effective at preventing COVID-19 following two doses given one month apart.
- The duration of protection against COVID-19 is currently unknown.
- While the vaccine may prevent you from getting sick, it is unknown at this time if you can still carry and transmit the virus to others. Until more is understood about how well the vaccine works, continuing with precautions such as mask-wearing and social distancing will be important.

If you get vaccinated do you still have to wear masks and remain socially distanced?

- **Yes.** Everyone, including persons who have received both doses of vaccine, should continue to follow CDC's recommendations on wearing masks, washing hands, and social distancing for the foreseeable future.
- It may take time for everyone who wants a COVID-19 vaccination to get one. A vaccine that is 95% effective means that about 1 out of 20 people who get it may not have protection from getting the illness.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine be mandatory?

No. Fenway Health is not requiring patients to be vaccinated. However, we strongly encourage you to get vaccinated when possible.