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Ask the Doctor!

*Chief Health Officer answers
COVID-19 Vaccine questions*

Turn on the TV and you're bound to hear breaking news about the COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination plans. It has spurred many questions and concerns from parents and the communities we serve.

At Health Partnership Clinic, our providers are talking with patients every day about the new COVID-19 vaccine. At this time, we have a very limited supply of vaccines and will only be vaccinating current HPC patients who meet the established criteria of both the state and county. We ask that HPC patients request a vaccine from his/her provider through the clinic's patient portal (<https://hpcks.org/patient-portal/>) or call 913-276-7012.

We're thrilled so many people are interested in becoming vaccinated to save lives. Community members are encouraged to contact their health providers and/or the county health departments. Meanwhile, Dr. Wael S. Mourad, MD, Chief Health Officer and a family physician, answers some "Frequently Asked Questions" to help you better understand COVID-19 vaccines.

Understanding Vaccines

1 | How do vaccines work?

Vaccines are a way to jumpstart your body's natural ability to fight a virus or bacteria without having to get sick from those germs. In the case of COVID-19, the vaccine is specifically made to protect you from the COVID-19 virus.

2 | What are antibodies?

Antibodies are proteins in the body that help fight infection. They can often protect you from getting that same disease again. Antibodies fight against specific diseases. COVID-19 antibodies, for example, only fight the COVID-19 virus.

COVID-19 Vaccines

3 | Should I get vaccinated for COVID-19?

Yes! The vaccine will help protect you from getting COVID-19. If you still get infected after you get vaccinated, the vaccine may prevent serious illness. By getting vaccinated, you can also help protect people around you.

Remember the vaccine, along with the other preventions – wearing a mask, staying physically distant from others and washing your hands frequently – are the best tools we have to protect against COVID-19 and end the pandemic.

4 | Is it safe, even though they were made quickly?

Yes! The COVID-19 vaccines have been thoroughly evaluated, using the same safety procedure and standards as every other vaccine that is available in the United States.

5 | This is a new kind of vaccine. Why should we trust it?

It is true that this is a different kind of vaccine, one based on messenger RNA technology (mRNA). This technology has been studied for decades and has been proven safe.

6 | Does it work?

The vaccines have remarkably high rates of effectiveness – higher than many flu vaccines.

So, yes, it works to give you immunity to COVID-19. The two vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) have been proven to be about 95 percent effective. And if you do get infected with COVID-19, your symptoms will likely be less severe if you have been vaccinated.

7|Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. You can't get COVID-19 from the vaccine. You may have side effects after a shot, but these are just a sign that the vaccine is working.

8|Will the shot hurt or make me sick?

There may be side effects, but they should go away within a few days. Possible side effects include a sore arm, headache, fever, or body aches. This does not mean you have COVID-19. Side effects are signs that the vaccine is working to build immunity. If they don't go away in a week, or you have more serious symptoms, call your doctor.

9|What about long-term side effects?

Each of the COVID-19 vaccines has been studied in more than 30,000 people. There is no evidence of any long-term side effects.

10|Who should get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Almost **everyone** should get the vaccine. This includes you, even if you're in any of these groups:

- **You're pregnant or breastfeeding.** The COVID-19 vaccine wasn't studied in these two groups, but the risk of serious COVID-19 infection in pregnant women is high.
- **You have problems with your immune system** that are caused by an underlying illness or the medicines you take. The vaccine may not be as effective for you. But it is safe, and it may help keep you from getting a very bad COVID-19 infection.
- **You have an autoimmune or rheumatologic disorder.** The vaccine is safe for you, and it won't cause your disorder to flare up.

- It may also help keep you from getting a very bad COVID-19 infection.
- **You have already had a COVID-19 infection.** The vaccine will help keep you from being re-infected with COVID-19.

11|I already had COVID-19. Do I need to get vaccinated?

Yes. It is possible to be re-infected with COVID-19. The natural immunity you get after the illness may not be long lasting – it varies from person to person. The best way to protect yourself – and others around you – is to be vaccinated.

12|Can't I just get immunity by catching COVID-19?

No. Trying to get immunity through infection can be dangerous.

- You may get very sick, or even die.
- You may spread the virus to others, who could also get very sick.
- It may not give you as strong of an immune response as the vaccine.

Vaccination is highly recommended!

13|Is it better to get natural immunity to COVID-19 rather than immunity from a vaccine?

No. While you may have some short-term antibody protection after recovering from COVID-19, we don't know how long this protection lasts. Vaccination is the best protection, and it is safe. People who get COVID-19 can have serious illnesses and some have debilitating symptoms that persist for months.

Special Medical Conditions and Groups

14|I have a condition (asthma, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, etc.). Should I get vaccinated?

Yes! People with chronic health conditions are at increased risk of severe illness with COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself is with vaccination.

The only people who should not get the vaccine are those who have had a severe allergic reaction to one of the components of the vaccine.

15|I'm pregnant or breast-feeding. Should I get vaccinated?

Yes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that women who are pregnant or breastfeeding receive vaccination to protect against COVID-19.

16|Can my child get vaccinated for COVID-19?

No. More studies need to be conducted before COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for children younger than age 16.

17|Are there any reasons someone should NOT get the COVID-19 vaccine?

There are **only** two reasons you shouldn't get the vaccine:

- **You're younger than 16** (The vaccine is currently being studied in children).
- **You have a history of a serious reaction (such as anaphylaxis) to a vaccine ingredient.**

In addition, some people will need to wait before they get the vaccine.

- **Wait to get the vaccine if you've been treated with a monoclonal antibody infusion in the last 90 days** for a COVID-19 infection. Get your vaccine after 90 days, when the antibodies are gone from your body.
- **Wait to get the vaccine if you have a short-term illness**, such as strep throat, or a stomach bug. Get the vaccine when you're feeling better.

Other

18|What does the vaccine cost?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that vaccines purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars will be given to the American people at no cost. Vaccination providers are allowed to assess an administration fee, however HPC patients will not be charged.

19|How do I report problems or bad reactions after getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccine recipients are encouraged to enroll in v-safe. This is a smartphone tool you can use to tell the CDC if you have any side effects after getting a COVID-19 vaccine. If you report serious side effects, someone from CDC will call to follow up. Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/vsafe.html>.

Don't Forget...Stop the Spread:

- Wear a mask over your nose and mouth.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from others.
- Avoid crowds.
- Avoid poorly ventilated spaces.
- Wash your hands often.
- Get vaccinated, when you can!

Information accurate as of 2-2021