

COVID-19 FAQs

EDUCATION RESOURCES FOR THE BLACK FAITH COMMUNITY

Here are some of the most frequently asked questions we've heard from the Black Faith Community. These questions have been vetted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). To learn more and to get the most up-to-date information, please visit getvaccineanswers.org

FAQS

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1. WHY SHOULD I GET VACCINATED?

Getting immunized against COVID-19 will keep most people from getting sick. Even in a rare case where one does catch the virus, the vaccine will likely prevent you from becoming seriously ill.

Protecting yourself also protects the people around you, like those at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 or those who can't get vaccinated — like infants, or people with weakened immune systems from things like chemotherapy for cancer.

We are still learning how the vaccine affects whether people can still transmit COVID-19 to others. It may be possible that a vaccinated person can still carry the virus and infect others, even if that person does not appear to be sick.

That's why, until enough Americans are vaccinated to fight off COVID-19, we will need to keep wearing masks, stay 6 feet apart from people we don't live with, avoid crowds, and wash our hands frequently.

2. HOW DO I KNOW I SHOULD OR CAN TRUST THE VACCINES? GOVERNMENT HEALTH OFFICIALS?

Researchers began developing vaccines for COVID-19 in January 2020, based on decades of understanding immune response and how vaccines work. Thousands of volunteers participated in clinical trials that started that spring, making sure we can trust the vaccines to be safe and effective.

Based on the results, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized multiple vaccines for public use in December 2020 and a third in February 2021. The vaccines met the agency's rigorous and science-based standards for quality, safety, and effectiveness.

COVID-19 is a new virus requiring new vaccines, but vaccines have been saving lives and protecting us for centuries. Now, medical experts believe COVID-19 vaccines can help us move forward in our everyday lives.

As of August 2021, the FDA has fully approved the Pfizer vaccine (Comirnaty) for use in the United States.

3. HOW ARE VACCINES TESTED FOR SAFETY?

Every vaccine must go through rigorous testing and inspection to ensure it is safe.

Vaccines for COVID-19 followed a 3-phase process where there are several stages before FDA authorization:

Phase 1: The vaccine is tested in a small number of generally healthy adults, usually between 20 and 80 people. It's evaluated for safety, dosage, and any side effects. Experts also look at what type of immune response is created.

Phase 2: If there are no safety concerns from Phase 1 studies, the vaccine is given in various dosages to hundreds of adults who may have a variety of health issues and come from different backgrounds to make sure it is safe. These studies provide additional safety information on common short-term side effects and risks, examine the relationship between the dose given and the immune response, and may provide initial information regarding the effectiveness of the vaccine.

Phase 3: Experts broaden the study to include thousands of adults, from a variety of ages and backgrounds. They see how many people who got the vaccine were protected from the disease, compared to those who received a placebo.

4. DID THE CLINICAL TRIALS INCLUDE PEOPLE LIKE ME?

Researchers made sure that the trials included adults of diverse backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and geographic areas. They collaborated with faith leaders, community organizations, and health clinics to reach volunteers from many different walks of life across the United States.

Medical experts and doctors want to make sure the vaccines work safely and effectively for as many people as possible. People may respond differently to vaccines based on factors like age, gender, and health conditions — so it is important to have a diverse group of participants in clinical trials.

COVID-19 has hit hard in the Black and Hispanic communities. Historically, these populations haven't always been included in clinical research, but with COVID-19 vaccines researchers made sure volunteers included people of color, as well as people over the age of 65 who are at higher risk of complications from the virus.

At this time, the studies do not include pregnant women or young children, but testing with those groups will likely begin in the near future. Pregnant women who get infected with COVID-19 disease are more likely to have severe disease.

People who are pregnant and part of a group recommended to receive COVID-19 vaccine, such as healthcare personnel, may choose to be vaccinated. A conversation between pregnant

patients and their clinicians may help them decide whether to get vaccinated.

5. HOW LONG DOES THE VACCINE'S MATERIALS LAST IN A PERSON'S BODY?

Immunization against COVID-19 will help protect you for the near future, but it's still not clear how long the protection will last. We will have a clearer picture of how long immunity lasts in years to come when we have collected more data. Both natural immunity and immunity from the vaccine are important ways to fight COVID-19 that experts are trying to learn more about, and places like the CDC will keep the public informed as new evidence becomes available.

6. DO ANY OF THE VACCINES INCLUDE MRNA? IF SO, WHAT IS MRNA?

Yes. mRNA vaccines have been in development for years and have been proven to be safe and effective. They build immune protection by copying the shape of the virus without actually including a piece of the virus itself.

mRNA stands for messenger ribonucleic acid and can most easily be described as instructions for how to make a protein, or even just a piece of a protein.

mRNA is not able to alter our genetic makeup (DNA).

The mRNA from a COVID-19 vaccine does not affect or interact with our DNA in any way. Instead,

COVID-19 vaccines that use mRNA work with the body's natural defenses to safely develop immunity to disease.

7. ARE THERE SIDE EFFECTS?

It's normal to experience some mild discomfort following a vaccine. This means it's working and creating an immune response in your body.

You may feel soreness or experience some swelling in your arm. You may also feel tired, have a headache, fever, or chills. These symptoms do not mean you have COVID-19 — it's not possible to get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

These symptoms may impact your daily activities, but they shouldn't last more than 2-3 days. If they continue or get worse, call your doctor, nurse, or clinic.

Even if you have these types of effects after your first shot, it's important to make sure you get the second one, unless a vaccination provider or your doctor tells you not to get a second shot. Ask your doctor

if you have questions. Your body takes time to build immunity. You may not be fully protected against COVID-19 until 1-2 weeks after your second shot.

In most cases, discomfort from fever or pain is normal. Contact your doctor or healthcare provider:

- If the redness or tenderness where you got the shot increases after 24 hours
- If your symptoms are worrying you or do not seem to be going away after a few days
- If you get a COVID-19 vaccine and you think you might be having a severe allergic reaction after leaving the vaccination site, seek immediate medical care by calling 911. Learn more about COVID-19 vaccines and rare severe allergic reactions.

8. HOW WILL PRE-EXISTING HEALTH CONDITIONS IMPACT THE VACCINE? WILL IT CAUSE ADDITIONAL SIDE EFFECTS?

People with underlying medical conditions can receive the FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines. In fact, vaccination is especially important for adults of any age with certain underlying medical conditions, like diabetes and high blood pressure, because they are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Ask your doctor if you have specific questions.

9. IS THE VACCINE SAFE FOR THOSE WHO ARE IMMUNOCOMPROMISED?

People with autoimmune conditions may receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. However, they should consult with their doctor, nurse or other health provider to discuss whether to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

10. HOW DO THESE VACCINES PROTECT ME?

When we get a vaccine, it activates our immune response. This helps our bodies learn to fight off the virus without the danger of an actual infection. If we are exposed to the virus in the future, our immune system “remembers” how to fight it.

Some COVID-19 vaccines use messenger RNA, or mRNA. mRNA vaccines do not contain a live virus — they give our bodies “instructions” for how to make and fight the harmless spike-shaped proteins that will protect against a COVID-19 infection. While these vaccines use new technology, researchers have been studying them for decades.

11. WHY IS THERE MORE THAN ONE TYPE OF COVID-19 VACCINE?

Many teams of medical experts around the world have helped in the search for a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine — including many of the leading doctors here in the United States.

Having multiple vaccines in development and production is crucial so that vaccination programs can be rolled out in many different countries at the same time, reaching as many people as possible.

Hundreds of millions of vaccine doses have already been distributed and hundreds of millions more are in production. New vaccine candidates are also in development which may provide more options, as well as additional quantities for the American people.

12. HOW ARE THEY AUTHORIZED AND APPROVED FOR USE?

Researchers began developing vaccines for COVID-19 in January 2020, based on decades of understanding immune response and how vaccines work. Thousands of volunteers participated in clinical trials that started that spring, making sure we can trust the vaccines to be safe and effective.

Based on the results, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized multiple vaccines for public use. Recommended vaccines have met the agency’s rigorous and science-based standards for quality, safety, and effectiveness.

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13. HOW DO I GET VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19?

State and local governments will ultimately decide when each group gets access to vaccines based on the local supply. That way, communities can set the priorities that work for them. The federal government does not mandate vaccines or set the rules for each community.

As more vaccines are produced over the first half of 2021, more people will be able to get vaccinated based on recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the CDC.

If you have questions, make sure you talk to your doctor. Some people — like pregnant women or people with certain severe allergies — might be told to wait to get a specific vaccine once it’s available.

Your doctor should be able to tell you when and where you can get your shots. It might be at a hospital, the doctor's office, a pharmacy, or a drive-thru clinic.

14. IF I'VE ALREADY HAD COVID, WHEN CAN I TAKE THE VACCINE?

If you've had COVID-19 in the past 90 days, talk to your doctor about when you should get vaccinated. People who have already had COVID-19 should still eventually get vaccinated to ensure they are protected.

Over the next few months, with more and more people getting vaccinated, we will find out more about how the vaccines protect people who have already had COVID-19.

COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to you regardless of whether you already had COVID-19 infection. You should not be required to have an antibody test before you are vaccinated.

However, anyone currently infected with COVID-19 should wait to get vaccinated until after their illness has resolved and after they have met the criteria to discontinue isolation.

15. HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

There shouldn't be a cost to get vaccinated. Insurance providers will cover the cost of the vaccine, and the U.S. government has set up a system to cover costs for those who do not have insurance.

Vaccine doses bought by the U.S. government will be given to the public for free, however, vaccination providers will be able to charge an administration fee for giving the shot to someone. Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund.

16. DO VACCINES PROTECT AGAINST NEW VARIANTS?

New variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 illness have emerged. Current data suggest that COVID-19 vaccines used in the United States should work against these variants. For this reason,

COVID-19 vaccines are an essential tool to protect people against COVID-19, including against new variants. CDC recommends getting vaccinated as soon as a vaccine is available to you.

The Delta variant is dangerous and more contagious than the original COVID-19 virus. The good news is that all authorized vaccines provide strong protection against serious illness and hospitalization from the Delta variant.

17. DO I STILL HAVE TO WEAR A MASK ONCE I'M FULLY VACCINATED?

Yes. Until enough Americans are vaccinated, it's important to continue to wear a mask, stay 6 feet apart from people you don't live with, avoid crowds, and wash your hands frequently.

Researchers are working to understand whether you can still carry the virus and spread it to others if you've had the vaccine and are protected from getting sick.

Continuing to wear a mask helps protect others while we learn more about how COVID-19 spreads. It also helps protect people who are not able to get vaccinated — such as pregnant women or young children.

18. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES IN THE VACCINES?

All authorized COVID-19 vaccines provide significant protection from serious illness and hospitalization. Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 and following CDC's recommendations to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from COVID-19.

The Moderna vaccine is recommended for people age 18+ and includes 2 shots spaced 28 days apart. It is a messenger RNA, or mRNA, vaccine. Based on evidence from clinical trials, the Moderna vaccine was 94% effective at preventing COVID-19 and provides significant protection against serious illness.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is recommended for people age 16+ and include 2 shots spaced 21 days apart. It is an mRNA vaccine. Based on evidence from clinical trials, the Pfizer vaccine was 91% effective at preventing COVID-19 and provides significant protection against serious illness.

Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine is a viral vector vaccine and is delivered in one shot only. Based on evidence from clinical trials, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was 72% effective at preventing COVID-19 and provides significant protection against serious illness. Health officials are closely monitoring all vaccines for safety, including the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Having multiple vaccines is crucial so that vaccination programs can quickly reach as many people as possible.

As of August 2021, the FDA has fully approved the Pfizer vaccine (Comirnaty) for use in the United States.

19. WHEN CAN I GET BACK TO MY LIFE?

We need to work together to get to the end of this pandemic.

While trial data suggests authorized COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective, we will only manage the pandemic if enough people take them.

Vaccine manufacturers are producing and distributing millions of doses of the vaccines, but they won't all be available at once. That's why certain high-risk groups are getting them first.

Healthcare workers, seniors in long-term care facilities, frontline workers, and individuals over the age of 75 are the most vulnerable and will be able to get the vaccine first in most states. More doses will be available to other groups in the spring as the supply increases.

Until enough people have been immunized against COVID-19, we should continue wearing masks, staying 6 feet apart from people we don't live with, avoiding crowds, and washing our hands.

For more resources to make informed decisions about COVID-19
visit blackfaithvaccin toolkit.org