RAMSEY COUNTY
Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health

COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

Contents

Trending

President Trump said people 65+ are now eligible to get the vaccine, so how do I get access to it?

- We wish we had vaccine for everyone right now, but there isn't enough available in Ramsey County yet.
- Frontline workers and those most at-risk from the virus will be getting the vaccine first.
- We currently are only able to vaccinate health care workers and residents at congregate settings (like nursing homes) where the virus spreads easily.
- **Some of the next groups to get vaccinated will likely be other older individuals, but we don't have specific details on who or when the next groups will be vaccinated.**

Does the COVID-19 vaccine protect against variants?

- There is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccines will be less effective on variants.
- [More info - MDH](#)

Should I be concerned about the variant COVID-19 strain?

- Minnesota does have cases of the new variant strain of the COVID-19 virus (first detected in the United Kingdom).
- **At this time, there is no evidence that COVID-19 variants cause more severe illness or increased risk of death.**
- Viruses change over time through random mutation. New variants of a virus are expected.
- There are multiple variants of COVID-19 around the globe and in the U.S.
- [More info - MDH](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

When can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- The vaccine is being given out in phases. Phases are determined by state and local health experts. They are based on vaccinating people at highest risk of spreading the disease and those at highest risk of getting very sick from the disease.

- Phases are based on many things, like vaccine availability and population size.

- Minnesota and Ramsey County are using the following guidelines:
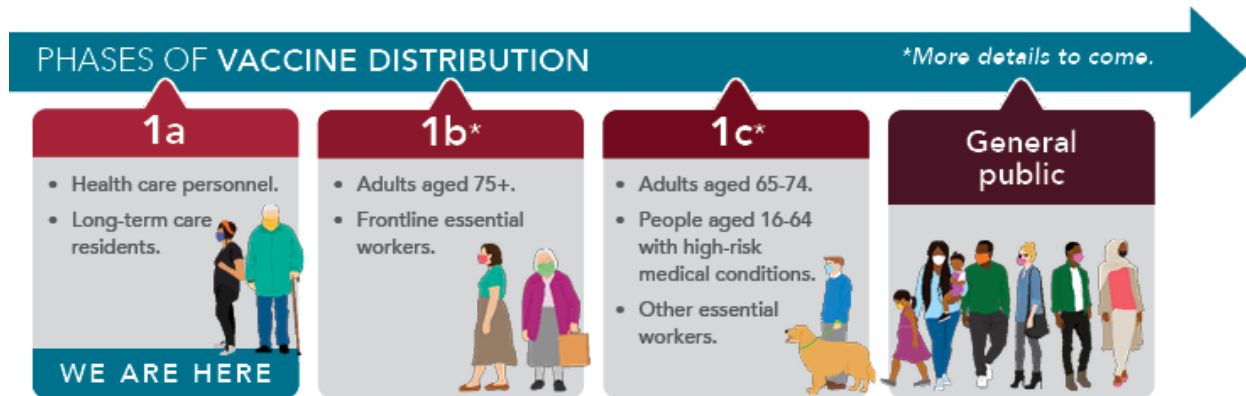
- **Phase timing and grouping may change** based on factors like vaccine availability, the number of high-risk people in a community, shipping logistics, and unforeseen components.

- Moving from one phase to the next will be determined by vaccine supply and uptake, so we can't give firm dates for when one phase will end, and another will begin.

- More info - MDH

Where can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- Phase 1a is based on employment and place of residence, so people in this phase will be contacted by their employer or the facility where they live.

- Later phases: vaccine will be available at settings like pharmacies, doctor's offices, and at clinics sponsored by the government.

- People will be able to make an appointment to get it.

- If you think it's your turn to get the vaccine, and don't know where to go, call the state's COVID-19 hotline: 1-800-657-3504.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine free?

- **Yes.** There may be a fee that will be billed to your insurance, but no payment is required from you.

- Insurance is not needed to get the vaccine.

- Be cautious of scams. Do not give bank/credit account information.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory?

- **No.** You will not be required to get the vaccine.

- Some employers may strongly recommend it. Contact your employer.

Why can't an employer require the vaccine?

- The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are under the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).

- **Under an EUA, employers cannot require employees to get the vaccine.**

- Once the vaccines are fully approved by the FDA, employers can require staff to be vaccinated.

- Check with your employer to learn more.

What can I do while I wait for the vaccine?

- Stay informed about vaccine phases: visit RamseyCounty.us/CovidVaccine.

- Continue to wear a mask, wash your hands often, stay 6 feet from others, and stay home if sick.

- Get a flu shot. While the flu vaccine does not protect against COVID-19, it prevents more illness, saves lives and avoids overwhelming the health care system.

- To find where to get a flu shot: VaccineFinder.org.

How many shots of the vaccine do I need to be protected? How fast does the vaccine work?

- The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines require **two shots/doses, separated by 3 or 4 weeks**, depending on the vaccine you get. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine (not approved yet) requires one shot.

- The person giving your vaccine will tell you when to come back for your second shot.

- If you don't get your second shot, you may not be fully protected.

- COVID-19 vaccines that require two doses may not protect you fully until a week or two after your second shot.

If someone had COVID-19, can they get sick again?

- **Yes.** Cases of reinfection with COVID-19 have been reported, but remain rare.

- There is not enough information currently available to say if, or for how long after infection, someone is protected against COVID-19.

- Because of this, it's important to continue good hygiene practices (e.g., wearing a mask and keeping socially distant).

Should someone who already had COVID-19 get the vaccine?

- **Yes.** It is recommended that everyone get the COVID-19 vaccine, even if they've gotten sick and recovered.

- Early evidence suggests natural immunity from COVID-19 may not last very long, but more studies are needed. (Natural immunity - the immunity your body builds after being infected with COVID-19.)

- Therefore, it's possible to get COVID-19 more than once.

How long will the COVID-19 vaccine protect me?

- **We don't quite know yet.** It is difficult to predict how long the vaccine will protect against the virus.

- Ongoing evaluation of the vaccine's protection will help us understand this more.

Should children get the vaccine?

- **Not yet.** Initial studies on the vaccines did not include children.

- Future studies will include children. With the results from these studies, along with CDC approval and guidance, we expect to vaccinate children in the future.

Is the vaccine safe for pregnant women and women trying to conceive?

- **We don't know yet.** Pregnant women and women trying to conceive were not included in the first round of clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccines, so no safety data is currently available for these groups.

- However, CDC recommends pregnant women consider the following:

  o Their personal risk of contracting COVID-19 by occupation or other activities.

  o The risk of COVID-19 to her and her growing baby.

  o Known side effects of the vaccine.

- Pregnant women and women trying to conceive should **talk with their health care provider** about risks and benefits of the vaccine.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

- Some side effects are common after vaccination. They are a result of your body responding to the vaccine, which is good.

- Side effects may include fever, chills, tiredness and headache (among others). Pain and swelling at the injection site are also common.

- These side effects usually last one or two days and usually don't prevent you for going about your daily activities.

- The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 disease. However, if you have side effects after vaccination that are similar to symptoms of COVID-19 and those symptoms continue or worsen, it's possible you may have been exposed to COVID-19 before getting the vaccine. Call your health care provider to determine next steps, like getting tested.

- More info - MDH

What about serious adverse events?

- A serious adverse event is something that is life-threatening.

- The Moderna and Pfizer vaccine studies looked for serious adverse events. Neither study found a pattern of serious adverse effects. Most adverse effects occur in the six weeks after getting a vaccine, and the studies had to watch participants for eight weeks. That does not mean that a rare serious adverse event won't happen as hundreds of thousands to millions of people get vaccinated.

- Since the approval of the Pfizer vaccine, there have been reports of some serious allergic reactions or anaphylaxis (an immune response of the body that causes someone to go into shock). Allergic reactions like this are known to happen after taking medicines or getting vaccinated, but **they are still very rare**. CDC and FDA are working to understand what might be causing this.

- Clinics are prepared to respond quickly to adverse reactions. You will be asked to wait 15-30 minutes after you have been vaccinated so that clinic staff can observe you.

- More info - MDH

How can I report side effects?

- CDC has an app for the vaccine, called **v-safe**. The app helps monitor COVID-19 vaccine safety after you get the COVID-19 vaccine. You can report side effects in the app. It also reminds you when you need your second dose.

- The provider who gives your vaccine can give you more information on v-safe.

- More info - CDC

I heard the COVID-19 vaccine contains mRNA. What does that mean? Is it safe?

- Messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines provide instructions that teach our bodies how to fight off COVID-19.

- **Even though mRNA vaccines are new, they are very safe.** mRNA vaccines are held to the same high safety standards and requirements as all other vaccines in the U.S.

- The COVID-19 vaccine does not contain living or dead COVID-19 virus.

- [Understanding mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines - CDC](#)

What's the difference between mRNA vaccines and other vaccines?

- mRNA vaccines contain temporary instructions that teach our immune systems to recognize COVID-19 virus and destroy it before it can infect us.

- Other types of vaccines teach a different way – instead of giving instructions, they show our immune systems a small version/piece of the virus, which teaches our bodies to identify the actual virus.

- [Understanding mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines - CDC](#)

Do mRNA vaccines change your DNA?

- **No.** mRNA vaccines do not change your DNA. mRNA does not even enter the cell nucleus, where DNA is located.

- [Understanding mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines - CDC](#)

What are the steps in creating a vaccine?

- There are multiple steps in the process of creating new vaccines. After laboratory research, three human clinical studies are completed to test the vaccine's safety and effectiveness.

- Next, the FDA approves the vaccine. A national advisory group from the CDC (called the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices or ACIP) recommends who should get the vaccine.

- As people get vaccinated, the CDC and FDA continue to look at data to ensure vaccine safety.

- [Vaccine Development 101 - FDA](#)

How was the COVID-19 vaccine created so quickly?

- The safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine is high priority.

- Research had already been done for many years on coronavirus vaccines, and new technology helped speed up the process for creating the COVID-19 vaccines.

- The federal government provided funding for the vaccine research, which also sped up the process.

- The vaccine was approved using Emergency Use Authorization, which also takes less time.

- [Ensuring the Safety of COVID-19 Vaccines in the United States - CDC](#)

I heard the COVID-19 vaccine must be kept cold. Does Ramsey County have a deep freezer?

- **Yes.**

- The Pfizer vaccine requires temperatures below -90 degrees Fahrenheit.

- All vaccines are warmed up before being given to people.

When will herd immunity happen?

- **We don't quite know yet.**

- Herd immunity is used to describe when enough people have protection from a virus/bacteria—either from previous infection or vaccination—that it is unlikely that virus/bacteria will spread in a community. As a result, everyone within the area is protected, even if some people didn't get a vaccine.

- Experts do not know what percentage of people will need to get vaccinated to achieve herd immunity to COVID-19. The percentage of people who need to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity varies by disease.

- [More info - MDH](#)

When will the pandemic end?

- When most of the population has been vaccinated or recovered from the virus. As time goes on, we will also have to evaluate whether future COVID-19 vaccines and doses will be needed.

What is Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)?

- Normally, the vaccine approval process takes years, since there may be existing alternatives that people can use in the meantime.

- With COVID-19, there are no acceptable or available alternatives, the virus spreads quickly, and it has a large negative impact on communities.

- Because of this, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued EUA to COVID-19 vaccines that work really well without major side effects.

- **All vaccines that receive EUA have been strictly tested and continue to receive ongoing safety monitoring.**