

FAQ: COVID VACCINES

AFSCME Council 31 recently sponsored a webinar to answer members' questions about the COVID vaccination program currently underway all across our country. Given time constraints, our presenters were unable to respond to the many questions submitted that evening. Below are answers to most of those questions.

What are the current COVID vaccines available in the United States?

There are currently three COVID 19 vaccines that have been authorized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in the United States. The Pfizer vaccine, the Moderna vaccine and the Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

As of March 22, some 120 million doses of these vaccines have been administered across the United States.

Are there any harmful side effects after taking these vaccines?

You may get some side effects from the COVID vaccine, which are normal signs that your body is building immunity protection. Possible side effects include pain and swelling in the arm where you got your shot, as well as fever, chills, tiredness and headache. Side effects are more common after the second dose and may feel like the flu, but they go away in a few days.

Severe allergic reactions to the COVID vaccine are very rare and treatable.

Source: [What to Expect after Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine | CDC](#)

When will the vaccine be offered to me?

The CDC has established priority recommendations for vaccination—and the early groups include frontline employees who are likely to be exposed to the virus. A significant number of public employees across Illinois have already had the opportunity to be vaccinated—nurse aides, mental health technicians, correctional officers, and many more. Employees eligible for vaccination have received notification from their employer.

Some employees are being offered the opportunity to receive the vaccine at a worksite vaccination clinic. In other instances employees have received the option to participate in off-site vaccination clinics or have been referred to their local public health department to schedule an appointment.

Eligibility was recently expanded to 'all government workers'—giving many more AFSCME members the opportunity to schedule appointments to be vaccinated.

Is the vaccine going to be mandatory in order to maintain employment with the state of Illinois?

The state of Illinois is not mandating vaccination for employees. Nor have any other public employers in Illinois mandated COVID vaccinations. At this time the vaccine is recommended by the Illinois Department of Public Health but is voluntary.

What are considered high risk medical conditions for COVID?

Adults of any age with certain underlying medical conditions listed below are at increased risk for severe illness from the COVID virus according to the CDC:

Cancer, chronic kidney disease, chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Down Syndrome, heart conditions, (e.g. heart failure, coronary artery disease and cardiomyopathies), Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant, obesity, pregnancy, Sickle cell disease, Type 2 diabetes.

However, the fact that these conditions make you more likely to become seriously ill from COVID does not mean that they will make you more likely to have an adverse reaction to the vaccine. In fact, clinical trials demonstrated safety and efficacy in persons with some underlying medical conditions compared to persons without such conditions. However, if you have any of these conditions, you should consult with your own physician to discuss any questions or concerns about receiving the COVID vaccine.

Source: [Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness | CDC](#); [Vaccine Considerations for People with Underlying Medical Conditions | CDC](#)

Will vaccines ever be approved by the FDA outside the Emergency Use Authorization process?

The FDA is responsible for regulating vaccines in the United States. Manufacturers of a new vaccine product must follow a multi-step approval process for distribution and use in the United States. Even though the Emergency Use Authorization allows distribution of a vaccine on a faster time frame, the process still requires rigorous evaluation of the vaccine to ensure safety and effectiveness.

Source: [Vaccine Testing and Approval Process | CDC](#)

What about people with eczema or allergies?

According to the FDA, there are only two types of individuals who shouldn't get the vaccine: those who have a known allergy to one of the vaccines' ingredients, and those who had a severe allergic reaction to their first dose.

The CDC recommends that people with a history of other allergic reactions—such as to food, animals, latex, or environmental—not related to injectable medications should get vaccinated.

If you have severe allergies, you should consult with your personal physician or allergy doctor to discuss any questions or concerns about receiving the COVID vaccine.

Source: [COVID-19 Vaccines and Allergic Reactions | CDC](#)

How do I make sure that my second shot is the same manufacturer as the first dose of the vaccine?

When you receive the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine, you will receive a card with the date of your first dose, the name/manufacturer of the vaccine received, and the date on which you should receive your second dose.

Many vaccine providers will instruct individuals on how to schedule a second dose of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine. One suggestion to make sure you receive the same manufacturer of vaccine for the second dose is to plan on returning to the same location where you received your first dose.

The Johnson and Johnson vaccine is a single dose vaccine that does not require a follow up shot for protection against COVID.

Does the COVID vaccine cause infertility?

This claim has no basis in fact. From the Mayo Clinic:

No, COVID-19 vaccines have not been linked to infertility or miscarriage.

A sophisticated disinformation campaign has been circulating online, claiming that antibodies to the spike protein of COVID-19 produced from these vaccines will bind to placental proteins and prevent pregnancy. This disinformation is thought to originate from internet postings by a former scientist known to hold anti-vaccine views.

These postings are not scientifically plausible, as COVID-19 infection has not been linked to infertility. Also, no other viral infection or vaccination-inducing immunity by similar mechanisms

has been shown to cause infertility. Antibodies to the spike protein have not been linked to infertility after COVID-19 infection. There is no scientific reason to believe this will change after vaccination for COVID-19.

Source: [COVID-19 vaccine myths debunked - Mayo Clinic Health System](#)

Can I go back to work right away after getting the vaccine?

The CDC currently recommends that individuals being vaccinated are observed by medical personnel for 15 minutes. Persons with a history of an immediate allergic reaction of any severity to a vaccine or injectable therapy and persons with a history of anaphylaxis will be observed 30 minutes.

After you have cleared the observation window period, you should be able to return to work without issue. In some cases, side effects—chills, fever, weakness—in the ensuing 24 hours may prevent you from returning to work immediately.

Is the COVID vaccine safe for nursing mothers and their infants?

After reviewing the data available on the Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson and Johnson vaccines, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' (ACOG) Immunization and Infectious Disease Work Group put forth recommendations stating that COVID-19 vaccines should be offered to lactating individuals similar to non-lactating individuals when they meet criteria for receipt for vaccine based on prioritization groups.

This guidance is aligned with the CDC, which states that because these are non-live virus vaccines, the mRNA vaccines and the Johnson and Johnson vaccine are not thought to be a risk to the breastfeeding infant, as well as the World Health Organization, which states the Moderna vaccine can be offered to breastfeeding women.

Source: [Vaccinating Pregnant and Lactating Patients Against COVID-19 | ACOG](#); [Vaccination Considerations for People who are Pregnant or Breastfeeding | CDC](#); [The Moderna COVID-19 \(mRNA-1273\) vaccine: what you need to know \(who.int\)](#)

For more information and questions answered: [The mRNA COVID-19 vaccine and pregnancy: What to know if you're pregnant, trying to conceive, or breastfeeding - UChicago Medicine](#)

Didn't the World Health Organization recommend that pregnant women do not get the vaccine?

The WHO has revised its guidance in that respect. Prior to January 29, the World Health Organization (WHO) suggested that pregnant women should not receive the Pfizer and Moderna vaccine unless they were at severe risk for exposure. The WHO has since updated its recommendation for Moderna vaccine, which now reads that *"based on what we know about this kind of vaccine, we don't have any specific reason to believe there will be specific risks that would outweigh the benefits of vaccination for pregnant women."*

This recommendation is now closely aligned with the CDC's stance as well as ACOG. After reviewing the data available on the Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson and Johnson vaccines, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' (ACOG) Immunization and Infectious Disease Work Group put forth recommendations stating that COVID-19 vaccines should not be withheld from pregnant individuals who meet criteria for vaccination when they are eligible based on priority group. ACOG recommends pregnant individuals work with their physicians to make an informed decision regarding vaccinating against COVID.

Source: [The Moderna COVID-19 \(mRNA-1273\) vaccine: what you need to know \(who.int\)](#); [Vaccinating Pregnant and Lactating Patients Against COVID-19 | ACOG](#); [ACOG and SMFM Joint Statement on WHO Recommendations Regarding COVID-19 Vaccines and Pregnant Individuals | ACOG](#)

For more information and questions answered: [The mRNA COVID-19 vaccine and pregnancy: What to know if you're pregnant, trying to conceive, or breastfeeding - UChicago Medicine](#)

Are there microchips in the vaccine?

This claim is false. From the Mayo Clinic:

There is no vaccine microchip, and the vaccine will not track people or gather personal information into a database. This myth started after comments made by Bill Gates from The Gates Foundation about a digital certificate of vaccine records. The technology he was referencing is not a microchip, has not been implemented in any manner and is not tied to the development, testing or distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

Source: [COVID-19 vaccine myths debunked - Mayo Clinic Health System](#)

What is AFSCME doing to push for more vaccine?

In Illinois and across the county AFSCME affiliates continue to raise the alarm over the health and safety risks COVID poses to frontline workers who have continued to provide vital services throughout the pandemic. These efforts include the need for increased vaccinations. Here in Illinois we have been successful in expanding vaccine access to all public employees and many employees in nonprofit agencies. AFSCME helped lead the charge in Washington, DC to pass President Biden's American Rescue Plan that includes funding to expand and strengthen vaccination programs all across the country.

Will vaccination change or slow the COVID variants?

Vaccines work by protecting individuals from contracting COVID, reducing the ability of the virus to spread across the population. In reducing the spread of COVID, vaccines can suppress the capacity of the virus to mutate or produce variants.

Scientists are working to learn more about the current variants that have been identified. Early research suggests that the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines do provide protection against the known variants, but more data is needed before definitive conclusions can be drawn. The Johnson and Johnson vaccine was also found to work against all variants. Vaccine manufacturers are also looking into creating booster shots to improve protection against these variants.

Source: [Get the facts about COVID-19 vaccines - Mayo Clinic](#); [New Variants of the Virus that Causes COVID-19 | CDC](#)

My church leaders have suggested that the vaccine uses fetal stem cells. Can you please talk about this?

While in the early stages of design, the mRNA vaccines used cell lines that may have been connected with fetal cells, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines do not use any fetal cells in the development or production of the vaccine.

In a memo, Bishop Rhoades and Archbishop Naumann (both Catholics) wrote to the bishops of the United States that the two mRNA vaccines appear to be ethically sound: "Neither the Pfizer nor Moderna vaccine involved the use of cell lines that originated in fetal tissue taken from the body of an aborted baby at any level of design, development or production."

More information about the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines and other COVID vaccines in development that do not use fetal cells in their manufacturing can be found on this helpful fact sheet issued by the North Dakota Health Department: [COVID-19 Vaccine Fetal Cell Handout.pdf](#).

Lastly, it is important to note that some religious groups and bioethics institutes that oppose the use of aborted fetal cells in development or manufacturing of vaccines have noted that individuals may ethically receive these vaccines when there are no ethically derived alternatives.

Source: [What connection does Moderna's vaccine have to aborted fetal tissue? \(catholicnewsagency.com\)](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/what-connection-does-moderna-s-vaccine-have-to-aborted-fetal-tissue/)

What are some trusted sources we can use if there are additional questions about the vaccine? What sources specifically should not be trusted?

As we all continue to navigate this unprecedented situation, trusted website and articles include:

- Government sites like the FDA, CDC, NIH, and Illinois Department of Public Health
- Non-Governmental Organizations like the World Health Organization
- Medical Journals like the New England Journal of Medicine
- Medical Provider Associations like the American Medical Association

When reading a blog post or information posted on a website by an individual or organization that you are not familiar with, it is best to do further research to see if the information can be corroborated by one of the trusted sources listed above.

I am a type 2 diabetic and do not know if there has been any research regarding my health condition and getting the vaccine.

According to the CDC, the COVID vaccines may be administered to people with underlying conditions provided they have not had a severe or immediate allergic reaction to any of the ingredients in the vaccine. Clinical trials demonstrated similar safety and efficacy in persons with some underlying medical conditions compared to persons without such conditions.

You should consult with your doctor to discuss any questions or concerns about receiving the COVID vaccine.

Source: [Interim Clinical Considerations for Use of COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s111621-covid-19-vaccines.html)

Do we still have to wear masks after receiving the vaccine? If so, at what point will the workplace safeguards such as social distancing, testing and mask wearing go away?

Experts are still studying the protection that the vaccine offers, but evidence suggests fully vaccinated people are less likely to have asymptomatic infection and transmit the virus to others... Recently the CDC updated its guidance that fully vaccinated people can visit with other fully vaccinated people or those at low risk for severe COVID without wearing masks or physical distancing. At this time the CDC still recommends that people in public spaces and large gatherings wear masks and avoid close contact with others to help prevent the spread of the virus even if you have received the COVID vaccine. This is due in part to the ongoing study of how long vaccine protection lasts as well as how much vaccines protect against emerging COVID variants.

Source: [Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s111621-covid-19-vaccines.html) ; [Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s111621-covid-19-vaccines.html)