

COVID-19 Vaccine Early Distribution

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is it possible to get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. Currently authorized COVID-19 vaccine, as well as those in development, use inactivated virus, pieces of the virus, or a gene from the virus. None of these can cause COVID-19.

2. How do the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work? And since this is the first use of these vaccines, how do we know they will be successful at preventing COVID-19?

Vaccines help train your body's natural immune system to recognize and fight a specific disease by stimulating a response to the virus that causes that disease. mRNA vaccines work by using a piece of a gene from the virus to make proteins that the body's immune system will recognize and make antibodies against.

Studies have shown that the authorized vaccines are highly effective in preventing confirmed COVID-19 disease.

3. Where can I view VA's COVID-19 vaccination plan?

You can find VA's full COVID-19 Vaccine Plan at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/n-coronavirus/VHA-COVID-Vaccine-Plan-14Dec2020.pdf>

4. Who will be offered the COVID-19 vaccine while supplies are limited?

Working with the CDC and other federal partners, VA developed a phased plan to benefit the most people. Under this phased plan, we'll first offer vaccines to VA health care personnel and Veterans residing in Community Living Centers or in Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorder Centers. VA will offer vaccination to additional Veterans at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 after health care personnel have been offered vaccine. Your facility will notify you when vaccine is available for you and provide information on how to schedule a vaccination.

VA based this phased plan on CDC guidelines. VA's phased plan is based on the following criteria:

- Risk of becoming infected with the virus
- Risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19
- Risk of spreading the virus to others
- Risk of harm to society if essential workers are unable to work.

VA's long-term goal is to vaccinate all Veterans and employees who are interested in receiving it.



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5. Where do Veterans fit in VA's COVID-19 vaccination planned order of priority for vaccination?

VA's most vulnerable Veterans are first on the list in VA's and CDC's phased plan. Our Veterans in our Community Living Centers and Spinal Cord Injury/Disease units will be vaccinated in the early phase of vaccine availability. This is consistent with recommendations from the Centers of Disease Control which is being used by the VA, federal partners and private sector healthcare delivery settings across the country. Healthcare personnel are also high on the list as they are at high risk for becoming infected and work tirelessly to keep the country's healthcare system functioning during this pandemic. Initial vaccine supply will be limited, so, we'll offer vaccines to veterans based on their risk of getting infection, risk of significant disease, and the risk of passing it on to others. Your care team will contact you if you are next to receive a vaccine.

6. How will I be notified when I can get the vaccine?

We will first offer vaccine to Veterans residing in Community Living Centers or receiving treatment at Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorder Centers. We will offer vaccine to additional Veterans at high risk of severe disease from COVID-19 after all health care personnel have been offered vaccine.

During this period of limited vaccine supply of vaccine, ***if your care team determines that you are eligible to receive the vaccine, you will be contacted directly by phone/mail/email when vaccine is available.***

Please note that as the supply of vaccine increases, we will be working with our care teams to let Veterans, who are not considered high-risk, know their options.

Check out the VA website [Vaccine Hub](#) for updates as to when vaccine will be available at other VA medical centers.

7. Do I need to pre-register to get the vaccine?

No. Veterans do not have to pre-register to receive the vaccine. Once more vaccine becomes available, staff will reach out to high-risk Veterans to discuss the vaccine, ask about their interest in receiving the vaccine and let Veterans how they can schedule an appointment to be vaccinated, if desired.

Over time, more vaccines will become available. VA's ultimate goal is to offer a COVID-19 vaccine to all Veterans enrolled in VA health care who want one.

Check out the VA website [Vaccine Hub](#) for updates as to when vaccine will be available at other VA medical centers.



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8. Which VA facilities have the first COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccine is now available in 37 VA medical centers that have the ability to vaccinate large numbers of people and store the vaccines at extremely cold temperatures. The list can be found [here](#). Due to the limited supply, vaccine will first be provided to highest risk individuals including healthcare personnel and residents of long-term care facilities. Care teams will reach out to Veterans as more vaccine is available.

We expect the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to be authorized and available later in December. The Moderna vaccine needs regular freezer storage capability, and we expect many VA facilities will receive this vaccine.

9. What happens if I change my mind and decide I do not want to get the COVID-19 vaccine after scheduling a time to get vaccinated?

You can change your mind at any time. Given the limited supply of vaccine, we simply ask that you contact your care team as soon as possible so we can offer the vaccine to another Veteran.

10. What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines?

According to the FDA's EUA for the Pfizer vaccine and the CDC's Vaccine Information Statement for the Pfizer vaccine, the most common side effects are:

- injection site pain
- tiredness
- headache
- muscle pain
- chills
- joint pain
- fever
- injection site swelling
- injection site redness
- nausea
- feeling unwell
- swollen lymph nodes (lymphadenopathy)

Most side effects go away within 48 hours.

There is a remote chance that the Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine could cause a severe allergic reaction. A severe allergic reaction would usually occur within a few minutes to one hour after getting a dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine. Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of your face and throat
- A fast heartbeat



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- A bad rash all over your body
- Dizziness and weakness

11. Will I be able to get the vaccine through my VA-approved community provider?

The COVID-19 vaccines that have been authorized for use as of this time require special storage and handling. Because of this, we'll start by offering vaccines through certain VA Medical Centers. When more vaccines are available, we'll determine when we can provide vaccines through our community provider network.

12. Can Family Caregivers recognized by the VA get the vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccination for caregivers of Veterans enrolled in VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers is not available at this time and would need to be offered through a humanitarian/4th mission assignment. If caregivers are offered vaccination under a 4th mission assignment, it will be in accordance with the VHA's COVID-19 vaccine prioritization group plan following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, and VA will notify caregivers directly. Caregivers are encouraged to take advantage of vaccination programs in their local community as they become available.

13. Will a prescription be necessary for a vaccine under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)?

If EUAs are issued for COVID-19 vaccines, it is expected that those vaccines may be administered without the requirement for an individual prescription for each vaccine recipient from an authorized health care provider. Under an EUA, FDA has an option to waive prescription requirements, if appropriate, depending on the authorized product specifics, authorized use, and/or emergency circumstances. In addition to an EUA, other legal authorities and/or plans may apply to vaccine administration:

- Legal authorities for relevant emergency response agencies (e.g., state, local, tribal and territorial health departments, health care professional licensing boards);
- Standing orders issued by a state health officer or applicable medical control officials or an executive order issued by a governor to authorize certain healthcare providers (e.g., nurses, pharmacists) to administer COVID-19 vaccine;
- State COVID-19 vaccination and emergency response plans; and
- CDC's COVID-19 Vaccination Program.

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Your Safe Care is Our Mission

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