COVID-19 Vaccine Considerations for Parents and Guardians

This document provides information to parents and caregivers regarding COVID-19 vaccines. COVID-19 vaccines are critical in preventing future disease outbreaks.[1] Multiple companies including, Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson's Janssen (J&J's), have developed vaccines and currently have emergency use approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

How do the vaccines work?

The COVID-19 vaccines vary by manufacturer.[2] The active ingredient in the current Pfizer and Moderna vaccines is mRNA, which contains genetic information on the virus.[4] J&J's vaccine includes a viral vector, which uses a modified virus to deliver genetic information.[6] The immune system recognizes the "foreign objects" from the mRNA and creates antibodies.[4] This process is similar to the natural immune response to an infection.[4] There is no risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 from this vaccine.[4]

How are the vaccines administered?

Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are administered in two doses, injected into the upper arm, and administered 3-4 weeks apart.[4,7] J&J's vaccine is injected into the upper arm in a single dose.[8]

COVID-19 vaccines were developed so quickly. Are they safe?

The development of vaccines includes a number of standard phases.[5] The COVID-19 vaccines have followed this same process.

1) Lab research testing of the vaccine candidate [Research and Discovery phase].
2) Lab testing with animals [Pre-Clinical phase].
3) FDA evaluation of the phase 1 & 2 data for safety to start human trials.
4) Testing with human participants. [Clinical Development phase]. There are three phases:
    a) Phase 1 includes 20-100 volunteers.
    b) Phase 2 includes 100s of volunteers while varying the dosages of the vaccine.
    c) Phase 3 includes thousands of volunteers.
5) FDA approval of the vaccine, analyzing benefits and risk.
6) Continued FDA oversight after the approval process. The goal of this oversight is to monitor for uncommon reactions and/or long-term problems.

In public health emergencies, this process may move more quickly due to various investments (ex: financial contributions, volunteers).[5] There is not a standard timeline as this process is guided by scientific knowledge.[5]

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that mRNA vaccines such as the COVID-19 vaccine are being held to the same rigorous standards as all other types of vaccines.[4] The only COVID-19 vaccines the FDA will make available for use are those that meet their standards.[4,5]

Who is paying for the vaccine?

The vaccine will be provided at no cost, but administration fees for giving the shot could be charged by the clinic or pharmacy.[9]

When can I get vaccinated?

Supply of the COVID-19 vaccine is limited at this time, but it is anticipated to become widely available soon.[9] Follow the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for vaccine timelines .[9]

What are the side effects?

Common side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines include[1,2]:

- Injection site reactions
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Joint pain
- Fever
- Nausea

Adverse reactions have been low (≤ 0.5%).[1] Reactions will continue to be monitored.[7] If you or your child is allergic to any of the ingredients in the COVID-19 vaccine, you or your child should not be vaccinated.[7]

Is the vaccine safe for kids?

Early clinical trials have focused on establishing safety and efficacy in adults.[7] Pfizer is approved for individuals 16 years old and older and approval is currently being sought for children 12-16 years of age. Moderna and J&J vaccines are approved for individuals ages 18 and up.[10] At this time, it is not recommended that children under 16 years of age receive the vaccine.[11] Clinical trials are ongoing, and these guidelines may change as more information is gathered on the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine for children.[7,11]

What do I do if my child cannot be vaccinated?[10]

Ensure the adults in contact with your child have been vaccinated.[12] Continue practicing safe behaviors, including wearing a mask, self-quarantining at home if anyone in the family is sick, practicing proper hand hygiene/washing, practicing physical distancing, and limiting time in places you or your child may be exposed to COVID-19. Continue to communicate with your child's doctor. They should be informed on the current data and safety of vaccination as more information becomes available.

If someone in my family has had COVID-19/has antibodies, should they still get vaccinated?[13]

Antibodies are the part of your immune system that fights off an infection you've had before. Current studies show that these antibodies for COVID-19 can last for 3-4 months. This varies between people. Although it is rare, it is still possible to become re-infected with COVID-19. Even if you previously had COVID-19 or has shown antibodies, you may still be advised to get the vaccine because of COVID-19's severe health risk.

How effective is the vaccine and how long does it last?

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are 95% and 94% effective two weeks following the second dose, respectively.[10] After one week, J&J's is effective against moderate to severe (72%) and severe disease (85%).[10] Current data is incomplete and still being gathered on how long this lasts.[9,10]

Does it prevent or cure COVID-19 infection?

The COVID-19 vaccines can prevent becoming infected with COVID-19, because it prepares the immune system.[12,14] Current COVID-19 infections cannot be cured with the vaccine.[14]

Can we return to normal activities after being vaccinated?

The CDC has released recommendations for activities post-vaccination. You should continue to practice safe behaviors such as wearing a mask, washing hands frequently, and practicing physical distancing after vaccination.[2,10]

Should my child and I wear masks when receiving a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, the CDC recommends wearing a mask when outside the home, including when receiving a vaccine.[2]

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