

Are the vaccines safe?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccines were tested the same way as every other vaccine in the United States. Strict processes were followed to ensure the vaccines were safe and effective for children. Each had to meet the same rigorous safety standards set by the FDA for all vaccines.

It's true that the COVID-19 vaccines were produced faster than any other vaccine. That was due to years of prior research on similar viruses. These included severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). Scientists weren't starting their research from scratch. Also, the deadly nature of the pandemic made vaccine development a priority.

Do the vaccines work?

Yes, two weeks after the second dose in a 2-dose series (Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech) or ≥ 2 weeks following a SINGLE dose of Johnson & Johnson, your vaccine is about 95% effective.

Are there side effects?

You may experience mild to moderate side effects. Your arm may be sore or you may feel tired. Side effects may feel like flu, with headache, body ache, chills or fever. Side effects are common and should go away in a few days.

How should I treat my side effects?

- For arm pain, apply a cool, wet washcloth. Keep moving your arm.
- For fever, drink plenty of fluids.
- For other pain, ask your doctor about medications you can buy at the drug store, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

Contact your doctor if:

- Your arm pain gets worse after 24 hours
- Your side effects don't go away after a few days



What about allergic reactions?

As with any medication, you may have an allergic reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine. This risk is very small. To be on the safe side, health care workers may ask you to stay so they can watch for an allergic reaction.

Don't take the vaccine if:

- You've had a severe allergic reaction to a previous vaccine, or
- You know you've had an allergic reaction to polyethylene glycol (PEG) or polysorbate. Polysorbate is not an ingredient in either mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. It is closely related to PEG, though. PEG is in the vaccines.

Severe allergic reactions to **medications**, rather than vaccines, do not disqualify you. If you've had a severe allergic reaction to a medication, but not a vaccine, you should get the COVID-19 vaccine.

If you have additional concerns about your risk of a severe allergic reaction, call your doctor.

When should I call 911?

Call 911 if you experience the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of your face and throat
- Fast heartbeat
- Bad rash all over your body
- Dizziness and weakness

What symptoms are NOT side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID specific symptoms (loss of taste, loss of smell, cough, shortness of breath) **ARE NOT** vaccine side effects. If these symptoms develop, it is possible you contracted COVID-19 and may need to seek medical attention.

Do I need both shots, or will one be OK?

You need both doses in a two-dose series for full protection.

If I've had COVID-19, do I still need to get vaccinated?

Get your vaccine. Although getting COVID-19 twice is rare, we know it has happened. If you've had COVID-19, wait at least 90 days from your date of diagnosis before getting your shot.

How long will the vaccine protect me from COVID-19?

It's possible that over time you will need another dose, as with the flu vaccine. At this time, we think the vaccine will protect you for at least a few months. Scientists are studying this issue.

How much does the vaccine cost?

You will not have any out-of-pocket cost for the vaccine. It will be offered to all Americans at no cost. Any fees will be covered either by insurance companies or by the federal government.

After I get my shot, can I stop wearing a face mask and social distancing?

No. It takes a few weeks for the vaccine to work. During that time, you might get and spread the virus. Once the vaccine takes effect, you may still be able to spread the virus. Scientists are studying this issue. To keep everyone around you safe, wear your face mask, social distance and wash your hands frequently.

For the latest information about COVID-19 vaccination in Virginia, visit the Virginia Department of Health, vdh.virginia.gov/covid-19-vaccine, or the CHoR COVID-19 site, chrichmond.org/covid-19.