

Massachusetts and City of Lynn Department of Public Health COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs

How do we know if the vaccine is safe?

It's important to know that vaccines go through more testing than any other pharmaceuticals. Before any vaccine is made available, it must go through rigorous development and testing. Manufacturing is critical — every dose must consistently be high quality. Additionally, [extensive testing in clinical trials](#) is conducted to prove safety. First, small groups of people receive the trial vaccine. Next, vaccine is given to people with particular characteristics (e.g., age and physical health). Then, vaccine is given to tens of thousands of people and tested for effectiveness and safety.

After that, the data is reviewed by the FDA which approves the vaccine, and by an independent board, CDC's [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices](#) (ACIP) which will make its recommendations for use. These bodies are the final safeguards for the public ensuring any vaccine is both safe and effective.

Please visit [Ensuring the Safety of COVID-19 Vaccines in the United States | CDC](#) for more information.

When can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Please visit [When can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?](#) to learn where you will fit into the COVID-19 vaccine distribution timeline.

The general public (those not falling into one of the higher risk categories) is not expected to be offered vaccine until later in 2021.

Vaccine prioritization will occur in phases:

1. **Phase 1** (December 2020 – February 2021): Approved vaccines start to go to 5 priority groups (listed in order of priority):
 - Clinical and non-clinical health care workers doing direct and COVID-facing care
 - Long term care facilities, rest homes and assisted living facilities
 - Police, fire and emergency medical services
 - Congregate care settings (including corrections and shelters)
 - Home-based health care workers
 - Health care workers doing non-COVID-facing care
2. **Phase 2** (February – March 2021; listed in order of priority):

- Individuals with 2+ [comorbidities](#) (high risk for COVID-19 complications), individuals 75+, and residents and staff of public and private low income and affordable senior housing
 - Early education, K-12, transit, grocery, utility, food and agriculture, sanitation, public works and public health workers
 - Adults 65+
 - Individuals with one [co-morbid condition](#)
3. **Phase 3** (Starting in April 2021): Vaccine is expected to be available to the general public.

[Learn more about the distribution timeline here.](#)

Do the COVID-19 vaccines have any side effects?

It is possible that some people may have side effects after being vaccinated, which are normal signs that your body is building protection. These side effects may affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. For the Pfizer vaccine, the most common side effects are pain at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, and fever. More people experienced these side effects after the second Pfizer dose than after the first dose, so it is important to expect that there may be some side effects after either dose, but even more so after the second. For the Moderna vaccine, the most common side effects are pain, tenderness, swelling and redness at the injection site, as well as fatigue, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, chills, nausea and vomiting, and fever.

Should someone with a history of allergies get the COVID-19 vaccine?

You should not get the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines if you have a history of severe allergic reaction (e.g., anaphylaxis) to any ingredient in the vaccine. A history of a severe allergic reaction due to any other cause is considered a precaution and should be discussed with your health care provider before receiving the vaccine.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe for children?

At this time, the Pfizer vaccine is authorized for people ages 16 and older, and the Moderna vaccine is authorized for people ages 18 and older. Younger children and adolescents should not receive COVID-19 vaccination at this time.

Should someone who is pregnant or lactating get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Currently there are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in people who are pregnant. COVID-19 infection during pregnancy can increase the risk of severe illness and might result in an increased risk of outcomes like preterm birth. Getting vaccinated is a personal choice for people who are pregnant.

There are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in lactating women or on the effects of the vaccine on the breastfed infant. People who are breastfeeding may choose to be vaccinated. The [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) recommend that COVID-19 vaccines

be offered to lactating individuals when they meet prioritization criteria for receiving the vaccine.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding and have questions around getting vaccinated, a discussion with your healthcare provider might help you make an informed decision.

What will be done to prioritize those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19?

In Phases 2 and 3, Massachusetts will set aside 20 percent of the vaccine to providers in communities that have been the most affected by COVID-19. These communities will be decided based on US Census data and COVID-19 cases per capita on the city and town level.

Will I have to pay for the vaccine?

[The vaccine is being provided free of charge](#) to all individuals by the federal government. Insurance companies are also committed to not charging any out-of-pocket fees or co-payments related to COVID-19 vaccine administration, and all health care provider sites that receive COVID-19 vaccine must agree to not charge patients any out-of-pocket fees or deny anyone vaccination services.

May undocumented immigrants receive the vaccine for free?

Yes. The vaccine itself is free for all Massachusetts residents. Health insurance (including Medicare and Medicaid) will cover the cost of administering the vaccine. For patients without health insurance, health care providers may request reimbursement from the federal government for the cost of administering vaccine to undocumented immigrants.

Will getting the vaccine adversely impact a patient's immigration status?

No. The federal government has confirmed that it will not consider COVID-19 treatment (including a vaccine) as part of a determination of whether someone is a "public charge" or as it relates to the public benefit condition for certain individuals seeking an extension of stay or change of status, even if the vaccine is paid for by Medicaid or other federal funds.

Is a patient's vaccination record protected from disclosure?

The Department of Public Health will maintain an electronic record of each patient in Massachusetts who receives the COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine database is kept confidential like a patient's medical record with her doctor.

Will I need to be tested for COVID-19 before getting the vaccine?

No, a COVID-19 test is not needed before getting the vaccine.

Should someone who is COVID-19-positive receive the vaccine?

Not if they are symptomatic. Vaccination of people who are known to have COVID-19 should be delayed until they no longer have symptoms and have completion of the isolation period. Isolation period being defined as 10 days from symptom onset date + 24 hours symptom free or 10 days from testing positive for asymptomatic cases.

Should people who have had COVID-19 be vaccinated?

Yes, people who have previously had COVID-19 should be vaccinated. People who are within 90 days of recovering from COVID-19 may defer vaccination, if desired, because current evidence suggests reinfection is uncommon during this time. However, those people *are eligible* to be vaccinated within the 90 days as long as they are recovered per the guidelines in the previous answer.

How long after getting the COVID-19 vaccine does it take to be effective?

It typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination. That means it's possible a person could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination and get sick. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection.

How long does protection from the COVID-19 vaccines last?

We do not have data yet to say for how long the COVID-19 vaccines will provide protection from getting sick even if you do get COVID-19. Experts continue to conduct more studies about whether the vaccines also keep people from spreading COVID-19.

Do I have to follow the Travel Order if I have received a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. At this time, vaccinated individuals must continue to comply with the Governor's Travel Order and related testing and quarantine requirements. It is important for everyone to continue using all the public health measures available to help stop this pandemic. Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others, stay at least 6 feet away from others, avoid crowds, and wash your hands often.

Do I need to wear a mask and avoid close contact with others if I have received two doses of the vaccine?

Yes. While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it will be important for everyone to continue using **all the tools** available to us to help stop this pandemic, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often, and staying at least 6 feet away from others.

When can I stop wearing a mask and avoiding close contact with others after I have been vaccinated?

There is not enough information currently available to say if or when CDC will stop recommending that people [wear masks](#) and [avoid close contact with others](#) to help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.