COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs

Last Updated: 12:05 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 2.

UNC Health is committed to making the COVID-19 vaccine available to our co-workers as soon as possible. As part of our mission to improve the health and well-being of North Carolinians, we plan to take every step to examine the safety and efficacy of each COVID-19 vaccine candidate. During this pandemic, now more than ever, it is critical that you have all the available information so you can feel confident in deciding how to protect yourself.

We do not currently plan to make the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory for UNC Health co-workers, providers or students. However, we encourage everyone to review the information on COVID-19 vaccines we will share. Based on current vaccine trial information, UNC Health expects to recommend that all co-workers, providers and students receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

We pledge to keep you informed with updates as we receive them. Please email COVID-19@unchealth.unc.edu with any additional questions.

About the COVID-19 Vaccines

What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccines currently prevent millions of deaths every year from diseases like diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, measles and influenza. They work by training and preparing the body's natural defenses - the immune system - to recognize and fight off the viruses and bacteria they target. This way, if the body is exposed to those disease-causing germs later, the body is immediately ready to destroy them, preventing illness. Vaccines are also critical to the prevention and control of infectious-disease outbreaks.

With a COVID-19 vaccine, UNC Health highly recommends healthcare personnel and patients receive a vaccine before they are exposed to the disease to prevent them from becoming sick.

When will a COVID-19 vaccine be available to UNC Health's healthcare personnel?

UNC Health currently anticipates the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will allow the use of two different vaccines between December 2020 and early January 2021.

How is the vaccine administered?

Healthcare personnel and patients may receive a COVID-19 vaccine as a shot into the muscle of the upper arm. A second dose is then administered either three or four weeks later depending on the vaccine.

What happens if I only get only one dose of the two-dose COVID-19 vaccine?

At this time, we do not know the exact effects from only receiving one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. However, we believe it would make the vaccine much less effective. UNC Health strongly recommends that everyone receive their second dose in a timely manner so that they may receive the maximum protection from the vaccine.

Are there any groups who should NOT receive a COVID-19 vaccine?

Children, pregnant women, breastfeeding women and immunocompromised individuals were not included in Phase Two of clinical trials, so we do not have a recommendation for these groups at this time. We expect to learn more details in the next few weeks as part of any authorization for use from the FDA.

What if I have already had COVID-19? Should I still get the vaccine?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and UNC Health recommend all eligible healthcare personnel and patients receive the COVID-19 vaccine regardless of their prior infection status. Additionally, a prior COVID-19 infection may not indicate immunity to the disease in the future.

Would I test positive for COVID-19 after receiving this vaccine?

No, you will not test positive on nose, throat or saliva tests because of the vaccine. You may test positive on the blood test (antibody), but this is not the test that we use to determine if someone is currently sick with COVID-19.

If you have an antibody test for COVID-19 after receiving the vaccine, you may see a positive result. A positive antibody test indicated past infection with SARS-CoV-2 or having had a vaccine.

A positive PCR COVID-19 test most often indicates current infection with SARS-CoV-2, although the PCR test many in some people remain positive for months. Receiving the vaccine will NOT lead to a positive a PCR COVID-19 test.

Where should I go for up-to-date information about the various COVID-19 vaccines?

Please use the COVID-19 Resources page on the Intranet for up-to-date information on the vaccines. We are also developing an external COVID-19 microsite to offer additional information.

Co-workers may also email COVID-19@unchealth.unc.edu with any additional questions.

The Effectiveness and Side Effects of COVID-19 Vaccines

How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine in the short- and long-term?

As of late November, early results from multiple studies of COVID-19 vaccines have been made public. These trials show that for people who received both doses of the vaccine, the vaccine is about 95% effective at preventing people from getting sick with COVID-19. This means there were 95% fewer people with COVID-19 in the study groups getting the vaccine compared to the groups who received a placebo.

We do not know the long-term ability of COVID-19 vaccines to prevent infection at this time. It is possible that healthcare personnel will need additional doses (boosters) of the vaccine in the future.

What are the short-term side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Individuals who receive a COVID-1 vaccine may experience mild to moderate side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine. Trials have shown the side effects typically occur at the site of the injection and do not last beyond a few days.

The most common side effect caused by the vaccine includes pain at the site where the vaccine was given, which is in the arm. Other side effects may include a headache, fever, chills or muscle aches – especially after the second shot.

What are the long-term side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

We are not aware of long-term side effects of COVID-19 vaccines at this time. However, based on prior vaccine trials, we remain confident in recommending the COVID-19 vaccines. As we receive more data in the coming weeks and months, we will continue to share updated information.

Why should I trust this vaccine for the prevention of COVID-19? If I receive the vaccine, will I become immune to COVID-19?

As of late November, early results from multiple studies of COVID-19 vaccines have been made public. These trials show that the vaccines are about 95% effective at preventing people from getting sick with COVID-19. This means there were 95% fewer people with COVID-19 in the study groups getting the vaccine compared to the groups who did not receive vaccine.

We do not know the long-term efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines at this time. It is possible that healthcare personnel will need additional doses (boosters) of the vaccine in the future.

Research on COVID-19 Vaccines

Have researchers from UNC Health and the UNC School of Medicine looked at the clinical trial data and/or vetted the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. We are extremely fortunate to have experts at UNC Health and the UNC School of Medicine, who are working together to review all of the available data and ensure the vaccine is safe for our healthcare personnel and patients.

We plan to rely on these experts, along with national ones like Dr. Anthony Fauci, to interpret the data. As we receive more data, our experts will continue to review and share any updated information.

What does it mean if the COVID-19 vaccine is provided under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)? If I receive the COVID-19 vaccine, am I participating in a clinical trial?

The Food & Drug Administration (FDA) may approve COVID-19 vaccines under an 'Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).' The EUA allows the FDA to help strengthen the nation's public health protections by providing more timely access to the approved vaccines.

Please watch this brief video to learn more. Receiving a COVID-19 vaccine in this way is not participation in a clinical trial.

Were diverse groups included in COVID-19 vaccine trials?
Yes. COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials included diverse and underrepresented groups.

COVID-19 Vaccines and UNC Health

Where do I go to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available?

COVID-19 vaccination distribution sites and times are still being finalized. We will share details widely once confirmed.

Which COVID-19 vaccine will be available to UNC Health personnel, and why?

UNC Health does not know which COVID-19 vaccine(s) we would receive at this time. However, our experts are currently reviewing the data for both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

How will UNC Health decide which healthcare personnel will be the first to receive the COVID-19 vaccine? How will I know when the vaccine is available to me?

UNC Health plans to follow the COVID-19 vaccine distribution guidance released by the CDC and NCDHHS.

Initially, COVID-19 vaccines will likely be made available for healthcare personnel who are at highest risk of exposure to the virus, such as those providing direct care to COVID-19 patients. As more vaccines become available, other groups will become eligible for vaccination.

Once finalized, we will post details of UNC Health's distribution plans and priority levels as recommended by the CDC and NCDHHS, and confirm by our experts, on the Intranet. We will also share these details via our mass communication channels.

Does UNC Health recommend that all healthcare personnel receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. Based on the current vaccine trial information, UNC Health recommends that all co-workers, providers and students receive a COVID-19 vaccine. The more people who receive vaccines, the closer we will be to reaching the end of this pandemic and returning to a more normal way of living.

The availability of a vaccine is an inflection point in our ability to protect our loved ones, patients, community and nation. We appreciate your open-mindedness as you consider the information and make the best decision for all of you.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine be mandatory for UNC Health personnel?

UNC Health does not currently plan to make the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory for our healthcare personnel.

However, we encourage all co-workers to review and understand the available information on COVID-19 vaccines and prepare for receiving one once it becomes available to them.

What information will be collected when I receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) distributes all COVID-19 vaccines and requires information from UNC Health on each vaccine recipient. This will include information that may be considered sensitive, including age, race and ethnicity.

How much will the COVID-19 vaccine cost for UNC Health personnel?

The COVID-19 vaccine will be free of charge to all UNC Health personnel.

I am a frontline healthcare provider for UNC Health. Will members of my immediate household be able to get the vaccine when I do? If so, what will it cost?

We do not yet know when family members or members of the public will be able to receive the vaccine. We will share details about access to the vaccine and distribution plans as they are finalized.

I am not a frontline healthcare provider for UNC Health. Will members of my immediate household be able to get the vaccine when I do? If so, what will it cost?

We do not yet know when family members or members of the public will be able to receive the vaccine. We will share details about access to the vaccine and distribution plans as they are finalized.

If I get the COVID-19 vaccine, do I need to keep wearing personal protective equipment (PPE)?

Yes. All UNC Health personnel, patients and visitors must continue to follow safety protocols, including PPE, physical distancing and meeting/gathering guidelines.

Vaccines are one important tool in our toolkit to fight COVID-19, but we have to use all of the tools if we are going to end this pandemic. Masking, social distancing, frequent hand washing and staying home when sick are all critical practices to continue even as we vaccinate.

How will the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine affect our:

- **Visitor policy:** Given our current supply of PPE and protocols currently in place, we do not plan to update our visitor policy at this time. However, visitor policies may vary by location. Please stay informed on your entity's policy at all times.

- **PPE guidelines:** Once we begin administering COVID-19 vaccines, and after individuals receive the vaccine, all healthcare personnel, patients and visitors must continue to wear a mask at all times in all UNC Health locations. Eye protection will still be required of healthcare personnel in clinical settings, and everyone must continue to practice physical distancing whenever possible – and especially when a mask is not worn (i.e. eating or drinking).

- **Mask Policy:** Our Universal Pandemic Precautions remain in effect. All healthcare personnel are expected to wear a mask and eye protection. To ensure the safety of our co-workers, patients and communities, we encourage you to continue tracking mask observations in the "Mask On, Mask Up" program, which is one of UNC Health's FY 21 goals.

Will UNC Health personnel who have been working remotely be asked to return to working on-site once they have received the COVID-19 vaccine?

No. Human Resources leaders are working with leaders across UNC Health separately to determine the "return to work" plans for non-clinical and non-patient-facing personnel who have worked remotely during the pandemic.

If it is determined that your team will return to a physical office space – whether in a permanent or hybrid scenario – you will receive *at least a 60-day notice* prior to returning to a physical work location.

If I have had the vaccine and the people I work most closely with, or socialize with, have had the vaccine – can we resume our regular in-person meetings, lunches, etc.?

No. All UNC Health personnel should continue to follow physical distancing guidelines along with the guidelines for meetings/gatherings.

Vaccines are one important tool in our toolkit to fight COVID-19, but we have to use all of the tools if we are going to end this pandemic. Masking, physical distancing, frequent handwashing and staying home when sick are all critical practices to continue even as we vaccinate.

COVID-19 Vaccines and UNC Health Patients

When will the COVID-19 vaccine be available to our patients?

UNC Health does not yet have a final timeline of when COVID-19 vaccines will be available to our patients.

Will clinicians be expected to recommend the COVID-19 vaccine to our patients?

UNC Health plans to share the best available data and recommendations from our Infectious Disease and Infection Prevention experts so that each individual can make the best possible decision for themselves, their loved ones and our patients.

What should clinicians say to patients who express concern regarding the vaccine?

UNC Health encourages everyone to share and reference the data we will make available through our internal communications and public channels. We want to **Lead the Way** by offering clear, concise resources to help our healthcare personnel, patients and communities make the best decision on whether or not to receive a vaccine.

Please note that UNC Health, as an organization, highly recommends that patients should receive a COVID-19 vaccine once available to them. We ask that all clinicians review the available information, along with the benefits and risks, with patients who ask about the vaccines.