

COVID-19 VACCINATION: FAQ FOR RESIDENTS & FAMILIES

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Note: What follows are selected Q&A relating to what is currently known about COVID-19 vaccination. This information is compiled from MDH and CDC, summarized by LeadingAge MN.

Why should I get vaccinated?

Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is one of the best ways to protect yourself and everyone around you, particularly those who are at increased risk for severe illness. Wearing masks and social distancing help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others, but these measures are not enough. Vaccines will work with your immune system, so it is ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Getting these shots will not only protect you from being infected; it will help us take a big step towards ending this pandemic.

When will the COVID-19 vaccination be available for residents? We expect to start residents and staff vaccinations at the end of December or early January. We have partnered with CVS pharmacy and are awaiting further information from them regarding timelines for vaccine administration.

Why is it important for long-term care staff and residents to receive the vaccination first?

The average age of residents in long term care facilities is 85 and almost every one of them has an underlying health condition, and some have multiple chronic conditions. According to CDC data, the risk of mortality in this age group is 630 times higher than those 18-29 years old. While many industries can stay open or partially open with safety measures, long term care communities will not be able to return to normal until there is a vaccine.

How will we receive the vaccine?

There are likely going to be two ways to receive the vaccine for your organization. Residents and Staff will receive their vaccines through the federal pharmacy partnership program (PPP). The PPP has a plan to offer multiple on-site clinics to facilitate the two doses needed for this vaccine. Jones-Harrison has partnered with CVS Pharmacy for vaccine delivery and coordination. This infrastructure will be helpful in ensuring that long term care residents and staff are among the first to receive the vaccine.

Is there any risk that I can get COVID-19 from the vaccination?

No, there is no risk of getting COVID-19 from the vaccination. This vaccination contains no actual COVID-19 virus. You may experience some side effects from the vaccine such as a sore arm, mild aches, or fever. This is your immune system responding to the vaccine and is expected. This does not mean you are getting sick with COVID-19. We need the vaccine to trigger this immune response to produce the immunity you need against COVID-19.

How do we know it's safe since it was developed so quickly?

Scientists have worked on coronavirus research for decades starting with the original SARS outbreak and influenza. Scientists only needed to isolate certain things about COVID-19 to begin creating a vaccine because we already know so much about the type of virus. Due to the public health crisis created by the pandemic, many private, government and independent groups came together and cooperated on a vaccine. This scale of cooperation is not typical, and the partnership created resources and information sharing to develop the vaccine faster.

What are the side effects of the vaccine? Are there long-term effects?

There may be side-effects from the COVID-19 vaccination such as a sore arm, mild, generalized aches, headache, and fever. These side effects are more common after the first injection and not as common after the second injection. This vaccine will not make you sick with COVID-19; the side-effects are a result of your body's immune system working to understand and create a response to the virus which is

needed for your immunity. The long-term effects are still being studied. The first two months show no severe side effects. As with all vaccinations, long-term effects are monitored for up to 10 years.

Should / can I still get a flu shot?

It is important you still receive a flu shot. However, it is not recommended to have a flu shot within one month of the COVID-19 vaccine. If you have not already received your flu shot, speak with your supervisor or your doctor about the best plan for receiving flu vaccine and COVID-19 vaccine. Jones-Harrison has already administered the flu shot to those residents that elected to receive it.

Will I have to pay for it?

No, there will be no cost to you for the vaccine.

How many shots will I need and when?

The vaccine includes two injections. The second injection will either be given 21- or 28-days after the first injection. The timeframe for the second injection depends upon the manufacturer and what is written in the emergency use authorization. Your organization will make sure you have this information once vaccines are distributed and ready for administration.

How long is the vaccine effective?

We don't know. Because the vaccine is new, the length of immunity is unknown. There are some vaccines that do not require additional shots and there are other vaccines, such as the tetanus vaccine, that require periodic boosters. The vaccine will continue to be studied over time and if additional boosters are needed that information will be released when it is known.

Is it better to get natural immunity for COVID by getting the virus instead of the vaccine?

In many cases, the way to develop natural immunity to a pathogen is to become sick, have our immune systems respond, and then our immune system "remembers" the pathogen to keep us from getting sick again. However, our immune systems cannot always "remember" the pathogen; or, it cannot always fight off the virus. Right now, we don't know if becoming sick with COVID-19 actually causes you to be immune to re-infection with the virus or not. We believe the vaccination does provide immunity to the disease. Additionally, there is no way to predict whether or not someone with COVID-19 will develop severe disease and suffer significant health complications or not; becoming sick is a risk and there is no way to predict the outcome of illness. You will not become sick from the COVID-19 vaccine.

What happens when long-term care residents are vaccinated? Can we begin to reopen our community?

Long term care facilities will not be able to return to normal until a vaccine is administered to most residents and staff. As soon as we start to successfully administer the vaccine in our communities, we hope can begin to discuss what's next for our community and for long-term care communities across our state. Until that time, please continue your infection prevention and control practices and follow the most current visitation guidance, even after you start vaccinations.