What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the disease caused by a virus (SARS-CoV-2) that came about in December 2019. It spreads from person to person. You can see if you have it by taking a quick test.

How bad is it?

COVID-19 can be severe. It has killed over 1 million people in the U.S. Even people who survive COVID-19 can have lasting health problems.

What are the symptoms?

People with COVID-19 can feel a wide range of symptoms. These include:

- Fever or chills
- Shortness of breath
- Muscle or body aches
- New loss of taste or smell
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Cough
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Upset stomach

This list does not include all symptoms. Symptoms may change with new COVID-19 strains and can differ if you've gotten a vaccine or not.
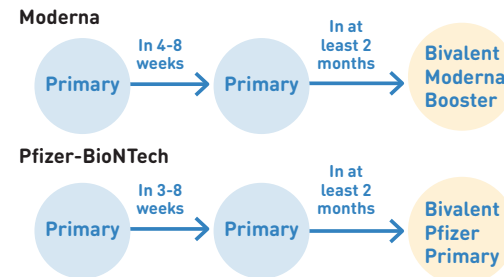

How can I protect myself from COVID-19?

You can protect yourself and the people you love by getting a COVID-19 vaccine and booster shot when you are able, taking a COVID-19 test when you feel sick, wearing a mask around others, washing your hands, and staying home when you're feeling under the weather.
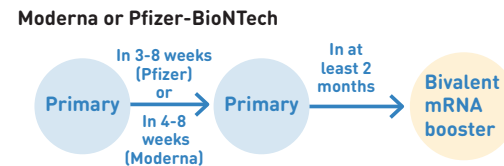
How many vaccine doses do I need? When do I need them?

Most people will need to get at least 2 shots of an mRNA vaccine to build their defense against COVID-19 and finish their primary series. Then, they will need to get a booster shot a few months later to "boost" that defense.

People who are 6 months through 4 years old

Moderna

Primary → (In 4–8 weeks) → Primary → (In at least 2 months) → Bivalent Moderna Booster

Pfizer-BioNTech

Primary → (In 3–8 weeks) → Primary → (In at least 2 months) → Bivalent Pfizer Primary

People who are 5+

Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech

Primary → (In 3–8 weeks (Pfizer) or In 4–8 weeks (Moderna)) → Primary → (In at least 2 months) → Bivalent mRNA booster

People with a very weak immune system (such as some older people and people with certain health problems) might need to take one more shot to complete their first series (at least 4 weeks after their 2nd shot). And then they will need to get a booster shot at least 2 months later.

Why should I get a vaccine when there are treatments for COVID-19?

The COVID-19 vaccines are the best line of defense against the virus. Treatments are helpful, but they don't always keep people from getting very sick or dying from COVID-19. They do not replace vaccines. A bad case of COVID-19 can still cause major health problems. The vaccines help prevent these bad cases of COVID-19.

COVID-19:
What You Need to Know about the Virus, the Vaccines, and the Treatments

Updated March 2023

americares

I already had COVID-19. Why do I need a vaccine?

Your body did build up some defense against COVID-19 after you got sick the first time. But getting a COVID-19 shot adds to this defense. You can best protect yourself and your loved ones by getting your COVID-19 shots.

Who can get a vaccine?

- All people who are 6 months old or older can get a COVID-19 vaccine.
- You do not need to be a U.S. citizen or be covered by health insurance to get a free COVID-19 vaccine (and booster shot).

You can read more about when to get these vaccines and boosters on the back of this pamphlet.

Do the vaccines work?

COVID-19 vaccines do a very good job of keeping people from getting very sick from the disease. COVID-19 vaccines are not meant to prevent all people from catching the virus though. They are meant to keep us from getting very sick—or even dying—from COVID-19 when we do catch it.

People who haven't gotten a vaccine are

30x

more likely to end up in the hospital from COVID-19

Are the vaccines safe for adults?

Yes. The two mRNA vaccines, Pfizer and Moderna, are very safe and very good at preventing bad or deadly cases of COVID-19. The risk of feeling very bad side effects from vaccines is small—much smaller than the chance of getting bad side effects from COVID-19 itself.

Are the vaccines safe for children? What about their heart health?

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe for children. In very rare cases, tissue around the heart might become inflamed after getting a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine. This "myocarditis" or "pericarditis" has been most common in males from 12 to 17 years old after their 2nd dose.

This might sound scary, but know that:

1. **These cases are very rare**. The risk may be lowered by waiting 8 weeks between the 1st and 2nd doses.

2. **Most cases are minor.** Doctors can treat it with anti-inflammatory medicines or a prescription. It can even get better on its own. Patients often return to their daily activities after their symptoms improve.

3. **There is a higher chance of getting heart inflammation from a COVID-19 <u>infection</u> than from a COVID-19 <u>vaccine</u>.** COVID-19 infection causes myocarditis/pericarditis in about 1% of teens, and their recovery time is much longer.

Can I get a COVID-19 vaccine if I'm pregnant or wanting to become pregnant?

Yes. The vaccines have not been shown to make it harder for anyone, even teens and pre-teens, to have children in the future. The vaccines can even defend a pregnant mother and her baby from COVID-19.

According to one study,

84% of babies

who got very sick from COVID-19 were born to mothers who had not taken a COVID-19 vaccine.

I think I might have COVID-19. What do I do?

If you've been around someone who has COVID-19, start wearing a mask as soon as you find out. Even if you're not feeling sick, **you should take a COVID-19 test 5 days after you were last around that person**. If you do start feeling sick, take a test as soon as you can to see if it's COVID-19 or something else.

If you test positive, you should stay home and away from others (isolation) for at least five days. This is when you're most likely to spread it to someone else. The amount of time that you need to stay home depends on how sick you get.

If you get mild symptoms or no symptoms at all and are fever-free after 5 days, you can leave your home after day 5 but should wear a mask through day 10.

If you had moderate illness shortness of breath or trouble breathing) or severe illness (you were hospitalized), or you have a weak immune system, you should stay home through day 10.

If you ended isolation but your COVID-19 symptoms start again or worsen, you should restart your isolation from day 0.

Even if you test negative, you should still wear a mask when you're around others at home and indoors in public places through day 10—just to be safe.

Is there a treatment for COVID-19?

Yes! If you test positive and are more likely to get very sick from COVID-19, there are treatments that can lower your chances of being hospitalized or dying from the disease. These treatments must be prescribed by a healthcare provider.

Don't delay! These treatments must be started within days of when you first develop symptoms to work. Treatments include pills (like Paxlovid) and medicines that need to be given by IV.

Ask your doctor if you can get one of these treatments, even if your symptoms are mild right now.