



What Are COVID-19 Boosters?

Many vaccines require a booster. This one helps keep your immune system strong against COVID-19.

If you received a COVID-19 vaccine, you are still protected. To help extend that protection, booster shots are now authorized for some populations, including those 65 and older, those at higher risk for severe COVID-19, and those 18 and older who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Q Who is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine booster?

Of those who received a Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, the following groups should receive a booster shot at least six months after completing their initial series:

- Age 65 and older.
- Ages 50–64 with underlying medical conditions.
- Age 18 and older and living in long-term care settings.

In addition, of those who received a Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, the following groups may receive a booster shot at least six months after completing their initial series:

- Ages 18–49 with underlying medical conditions.
- Ages 18–64 and working or living in high-risk settings.

For individuals who received the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, booster shots are recommended for those who meet the following two criteria:

- Are age 18 and older.

And

- Were vaccinated two or more months ago.

Q Does the recommendation for a booster dose mean that the vaccines are not working?

No, they're still working! All COVID-19 vaccines prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death, even against the Delta variant; however, public health experts are starting to see reduced protection against mild and moderate disease — especially among certain populations.

Q With the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, why is the recommendation that some individuals “should” get a booster dose, while others “may” get a booster dose?

Compared with the general population, certain people are at increased risk for severe illness or exposure from COVID-19: those ages 18–49 who have underlying medical conditions, and those ages 18–64 whose living or working situation means they might be more exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19. Based on data, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) deemed these groups are eligible for the booster and recommends that individuals decide whether to get the booster based on their individual benefits and risk factors. This recommendation may change in the future as more data become available. Talk to your health care provider if you are unsure of whether or not to get the booster. At higher risk for severe illness are those who are 65 and older, those who are 50 and older who have underlying medical conditions, and people who live in long-term care settings.

Q What are examples of underlying medical conditions that may increase the risk of severe COVID-19?

Examples include:

- Cancer
- Cerebrovascular disease
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Diabetes
- Heart conditions (heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies)
- Obesity
- Pregnancy and recent pregnancy
- Smoking, current and former

Q What are examples of people who may benefit from a booster because their living or working situation increases their risk of illness?

Examples include:

- First responders (e.g., health care workers, firefighters, police, congregate care staff)
- Education staff (e.g., teachers, support staff, day care workers)
- Food and agriculture workers
- Manufacturing workers
- Corrections workers
- U.S. Postal Service workers
- Public transit workers
- Grocery store workers
- Those who live in a congregate setting (e.g., homeless shelter, correctional facility)

Q What's the difference between an additional COVID-19 vaccine dose and a booster dose?

- An additional dose (or third dose) of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) is now recommended for people with a weak immune system 28 days after their second dose. This is because their initial immune response after a two-dose series may not have been strong enough to protect them. This is part of the primary series.
- A booster dose of a vaccine is recommended when a person's initial immune response is likely to have decreased over time. Booster doses are currently recommended for at least six months after the primary series for certain people who received the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, and at least two months after the single primary dose for those who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Q Should I get the same vaccine brand as my primary series, or a different brand?

Eligible individuals may choose which vaccine they receive as a booster dose, depending on what is available and their own individual situation. For example, someone who received the Johnson & Johnson primary dose may instead choose to get a Moderna or Pfizer booster — and vice versa. Consider consulting your health care provider for additional guidance.

Q Are there side effects associated with the booster dose?

Reactions reported after the booster dose were similar to those of the primary series: most often, pain at the injection site and fatigue. Most side effects were mild to moderate. As with the primary series, serious side effects are rare. The risks of myocarditis and pericarditis after a third dose of an mRNA vaccine are unknown at this time. For many who have received their initial COVID-19 vaccine, the benefits of getting a booster shot outweigh the known and potential risks.