

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Vaccine—What You Need to Know



Why get vaccinated?

Vaccines fight disease by producing an immune response within the body. DoD personnel are highly encouraged to take the vaccine to protect their health, their families, their community, and lower the public health risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccination will reduce the burden of COVID-19 disease in high-risk populations and simultaneously mitigate risk to military operations.

Am I required to get vaccinated?

Not at this time. According to the latest DoD policy, vaccination will be completely voluntary while the vaccine is administered pursuant to an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). An EUA is granted only if the product is deemed safe and effective after clinical trials. Vaccination may become mandatory after the vaccine receives full FDA approval and licensure. There are no negative repercussions, either professionally or personally, for not accepting the vaccine while it is voluntary.

What vaccine would I receive and how does it work?

Of the five vaccines currently being studied by the FDA, the DoD is expected to initially receive the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines first. You might receive either of these two vaccines. They are not live virus vaccines. Both contain material from the virus that help our bodies build the protein cells needed to help fight the virus if you become infected in the future. Both vaccines require more than one shot to get the most protection. These shots will be administered between 21-28 days apart.

When will I be able to receive the vaccine?

Not immediately. Due to limited availability of initial vaccine doses, the first batch of vaccines received by DoD will be distributed and administered at select locations. We can expect them as early as the start of 2021 at Andersen AFB. Additionally, per CDC guidance, DoD will administer the first batch to health care providers/first responders and then in DOD long-term care facilities, to high-risk populations, those in critical national capability positions and finally, healthy populations. As more vaccines are made available over time, additional locations and additional personnel, besides health care providers, will be eligible to receive the vaccine.

How do I know the vaccine is safe?

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) carefully reviews all safety data from clinical trials and authorizes emergency vaccine use only when the expected benefits outweigh potential risks. The DoD will continue to work with FDA and CDC to monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines to make sure even very rare side effects are identified.

What are the known side effects?

Most people do not have serious problems after being vaccinated. However, your arm may be sore, red, or warm to the touch. These symptoms usually go away on their own within a week. Some people report getting a headache or fever when getting a vaccine. These side effects are a sign that your immune system is doing exactly what it is supposed to do. It is working and building up protection to disease. In very rare instances, a person can have an allergic reaction to a vaccine.

Are there any other risks associated with the vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccines are being tested in large clinical trials to assess their safety. However, it does take time, and more people being vaccinated before we learn about very rare or long-term side effects. That is why safety monitoring will continue.

How effective are the vaccines?

Current studies suggest that both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are between 94-95% effective at preventing COVID-19. The effective rate improves after the second dose is given. For this reason, it is important to receive the second dose.

What do I need to do prepare to take the vaccine?

As part of the initial phase of DoD planning, the MTF will be preparing a survey for eligible beneficiaries to determine who will be willing to take the vaccine when it becomes available. This data will help inform vaccine distribution. Your response will not incur any obligation should you decide to not receive the vaccination at a later point.

Will I still need to follow restrictions after the vaccine?

Yes. All DoD personnel will continue to wear appropriate masks, practice physical distancing, wash hands, and follow restriction of movement to protect our safety as a large portion of the population will need to be vaccinated before COVID-19 risks diminish.

How do I report if I have a problem or bad reaction after getting one of the COVID-19 vaccines?

CDC and FDA encourage the public to report possible side effects (called adverse events) to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) external icon. This national system collects these data to look for adverse events that are unexpected, appear to happen more often than expected, or have unusual patterns of occurrence. Learn about the difference between a vaccine side effect and an adverse event. Reports to VAERS help CDC monitor the safety of vaccines. Safety is a top priority. Healthcare providers will be required to report certain adverse events following vaccination to VAERS. CDC is also implementing a new smartphone-based tool called v-safe to check-in on people's health after they receive a COVID-19 vaccination. When you receive your vaccine, you should also receive a v-safe information sheet telling you how to enroll in v-safe. If you enroll, you will receive regular text messages directing you to surveys where you can report any problems or adverse reactions you have after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

If I have already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine when it's available?

There is not enough information currently available to say if or for how long after infection someone is protected from getting COVID-19 again; this is called natural immunity. Early evidence suggests natural immunity from COVID-19 may not last very long, but more studies are needed to better understand this. Until we have a vaccine available and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices makes recommendations to CDC on how to best use COVID-19 vaccines, CDC cannot comment on whether people who had COVID-19 should get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Why is a vaccine needed if we can do other things like physically distance and wear masks, to prevent the virus that causes COVID-19 from spreading?

Stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines work with your immune system so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Other steps, like wearing masks and social distancing, help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following CDC's recommendations to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from COVID-19.

PUT THESE LINKS ON AFPIMS

DoD personnel and eligible beneficiaries should consult their medical provider if they have any additional questions before they decide to take the vaccine. The following websites also contain helpful information to inform your decision:

Operation Warp Speed - <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Spotlight/Coronavirus/Operation-Warp-Speed/>

World Health Organization - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Food and Drug Administration - <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/counterterrorism-and-emerging-threats/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

Guam Department of Health and Social Services - <http://dphss.guam.gov/covid-19/>

AAFB COVID news - <https://www.andersen.af.mil/Units/36th-Medical-Group/COVID-19-Guidance/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

mRNA Vaccines - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html>