COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs

Do they work? Both vaccines have proven to be highly effective in large trials (94 95%). The vaccines can prevent the contraction COVID 19 or make symptoms less severe.

Are they safe? Yes. The FDA required that these vaccines be put through rigorous testing before authorizing their use. Many people were recruited to participate in trials to see how vaccines offer protection to people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as those with different medical conditions.

The vaccines were developed quickly. How do we know they are safe? The vaccines were developed quickly due to the use of messenger RNA (mRNA) technology. Researchers have been studying and working with mRNA vaccines for decades. mRNA vaccines can be developed in a laboratory using readily available materials. This means the process can be standardized and scaled up, making vaccine development faster than traditional methods of making vaccines.

mRNA vaccines have been studied before for flu, Zika, rabies, and cytomegalovirus (CMV). As soon as the necessary information about the virus that causes COVID-19 was available, scientists began designing the mRNA instructions for cells to build the unique spike protein into an mRNA vaccine.

How does the vaccine work? The COVID-19 mRNA vaccine provides instructions to our cells on how to make a "spike protein." This protein is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. After the protein is made, the cell breaks down the instructions and gets rid of them. The cell then displays the protein piece on its surface. The immune system recognizes that the protein does not belong, and begins building an immune response and making antibodies - like what happens in natural infections against COVID-19.

Can the vaccine give me COVID-19? mRNA vaccines do not contain live, dead, or weakened viruses. Instead, they use a tiny bit of genetic code that could be deployed into one part of a cell to stimulate a coronavirus immune response.

Are there side effects? Serious side effects from both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were rare in clinical trials. The most common side effects are injection site pain and swelling, as well as tiredness, fever and headache in the days after receiving the vaccine. There is no evidence for claims that the COVID 19 vaccine: Leads to sterility or infertility in vaccine recipients; Causes Bell's Palsy; Contains a microchip or any metal substance, or makes you susceptible to radiation; Changes your DNA or introduces external DNABased on the data, the benefits of the vaccine outweigh potential risks.

Who should not get the vaccine? For the large majority of people, the COVID-19 vaccine is safe. However some groups may need to consult with their doctor before deciding to get the vaccines. These include: People with allergies; Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding; and those with underlying medical conditions.

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Do I need the vaccine if I have already recovered from COVID? Yes. Due to the severe health risks associated with the disease, and that reinfection is possible, you should be vaccinated regardless of whether you have already been infected. If you were treated for COVID-19 symptoms with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma, you should wait 90 days before getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

What to expect when receiving the vaccine. You may be required to stay for a total of 30 minutes after receiving the vaccine to monitor for potential reactions. The vaccine may cause side effects, which are normal signs that your body is building protection. These side effects may affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. Common side effects include pain or swelling on the arm where you received the injection, as well as fever, chills, tiredness and headache. If you have pain or discomfort, talk to your doctor about taking an over-the-counter medicine, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

In most cases, discomfort from fever or pain is normal. Contact your doctor or healthcare provider:
- If the redness or tenderness where you got the shot increases after 24 hours
- If your side effects are worrying you or do not seem to be going away after a few days
- If you get a COVID-19 vaccine and you think you might be having a severe allergic reaction after leaving the vaccination site, seek immediate medical care by calling 911.

Do I need to wear a mask or social distance if I have had two doses of the vaccine? Yes. It is not yet known whether the vaccine will prevent you from spreading the virus to others, even if you don't get sick yourself. The Centers for Disease Control will continue to monitor data before revising this recommendation. Meanwhile, it is important that everyone continue using the tools we have available to stop the pandemic. To protect yourself and others, follow these recommendations: Wear a mask over your nose and mouth; Stay at least 6 feet away from others; Avoid crowds; Avoid poorly ventilated spaces; and Wash your hands often.

Scheduling your second shot?
Both COVID-19 mRNA vaccines will need 2 shots to get the most protection. The timing between your first and second shot depends on which vaccine you received. You should get your second shot as close to the recommended interval as possible. There is no maximum interval between the first and second doses for either vaccine, however you should not get the second dose earlier than the recommended interval. If you need help scheduling your vaccine appointment for your second shot, contact the location that set up your appointment for assistance.

* Information from the Centers for Disease Control.

How To Receive the Vaccine:
To learn more about Virginia's vaccine distribution plan, scan the QR code at right.