

YOUR COMPLETE COVID-19 VACCINE HANDBOOK

Answers to your
top questions

All the facts about safety

The most common
symptoms

PLUS: How to make your
appointment and more

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Vaccinate
The Natural State



Get Your Questions Answered (Starting With These Top 3)

Robert Hopkins, M.D., chair of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee and professor of internal medicine at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, shares the facts.

Once I get the shot*, how soon will I be protected—and for how long?

A You likely develop some antibodies within a couple of weeks of your first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccine. But you won't have the high level of protection reported in the trials until about two weeks after the second dose. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine requires only one shot and also takes a couple of weeks to fully take effect. Doctors don't know yet how long the shots will last, but they do know this: All three prevent hospitalization and death from COVID-19.

What if I already had COVID-19? Do I still need to get the shot?

A Yes. The immunity you get from the vaccines appears to be stronger than what you have if you were infected with the virus. In people who had COVID, the level of protection that develops and how long

it lasts is still unknown. For this reason, many experts recommend that you wait 90 days after being infected to receive the vaccine. Doing so could give you a longer period of immunity. People who have received monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma should also wait about three months after the treatment, so that the antibodies they were given do not interfere with the vaccine-related immune response.

Could the virus mutate and become resistant?

A Viruses mutate or change all the time. While some recent COVID mutations, including the strain first seen in the United Kingdom and now here in the U.S., seem to have made the virus more easily transmitted, they do not seem to have made it more deadly or severe. So far, these changes also haven't appeared to significantly reduce the effectiveness of the vaccines, either.



BY THE NUMBERS

100%

All of the COVID-19 vaccines prevent hospitalization and death

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHO IS ELIGIBLE OR FIND WHERE TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT? VISIT [HEALTHY.ARKANSAS.GOV](https://www.healthylarkansas.gov) OR CALL THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AT 1-800-803-7847.

*As of press time, three COVID-19 vaccines are FDA-approved: Moderna's, Pfizer/BioNTech's and Johnson & Johnson's.



Calm Your Fears About Safety

The new vaccines to fight COVID-19 are the fastest ever developed—but that doesn't mean they were hastily rushed to market. Here's why you can get your shot with confidence.

The new vaccines contain no actual coronavirus.

Conventional vaccines, such as for the flu or measles, use dead or weakened germs to stimulate an immune-system response. But the new vaccines work by delivering a set of instructions to your cells. They tell your body how to make its own spike proteins (the part the new coronavirus uses to infect cells). Your immune system recognizes these new proteins as invaders—they're actually harmless on their own—and builds its defenses. Should the real virus come along later, your body is primed to fight it off. Once the instructions used, your body disposes of them very shortly after.

Scientists drew on decades of research to create them.

These new COVID-19 vaccines were developed quickly, but the science behind them has been years in the making. Experimental mRNA vaccines, the technology used in the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech shots, have been in development for other infections for at least 10 to 15 years. Labs worldwide have been studying vaccines for other coronaviruses, including SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome). Plus, other scientists have been looking into the possibilities of similar vaccines for everything from the flu and rabies to Zika and HIV. They had a lot to build on.

Huge financial investments fueled development.

Public and private institutions invested billions in research, manufacturing, and vaccine distribution. "We've shortened the timeline tremendously because of investments and advances in science, but we have not skipped any critical step," says Robert Hopkins, M.D., chair of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee. "We're doing safety and efficacy studies, but we're also preparing to get vaccines out at the same time."

Millions have been vaccinated. Serious reactions are rare.

More than 100,000 people participated in the clinical trials, and the FDA carefully reviewed this data before declaring the shots safe and effective. As of mid March, more than 39 million Americans have been fully vaccinated. Serious adverse effects (mostly short-term allergic reactions) have been rare; there have been no deaths. COVID-19, meanwhile, has killed more than 533,000 in the U.S.



BY THE NUMBERS

105

The age of the oldest person in Arkansas to get the COVID-19 vaccine.



Ease Needle Anxiety

Who really likes getting poked? No one. But if you struggle with injections a little more than the average person, this advice can help get you through.

- 1. Tell your health care professional.** Letting the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist know you're anxious helps them help you.
- 2. Distract yourself.** Listen to your favorite music. Cue up an engaging podcast or a funny video on your smartphone. Or play mind games—count backward from 100, recite the alphabet in reverse, or think of a fruit or vegetable that starts with each letter of the alphabet.
- 3. Don't watch.** For some, it helps to not know when the shot goes into your arm.
- 4. Take deep, slow breaths.** "Diaphragmatic breathing can be both anxiety reducing and help redirect your attention," says Beth Salcedo, M.D., a psychiatrist and medical director of the Ross Center in Washington, D.C.
- 5. Remember that it's over in literally seconds!** And be proud that you, well, stuck with it.

PLAN TO TAKE IT EASY

If you can, try to schedule your shot on a day when you don't have a lot of other things to do. You might even want to build in a little downtime for a couple days after in case mild symptoms show up. (See the next page for details.)



BY THE NUMBERS

BETWEEN
21-28
DAYS

That's how long you'll wait before getting your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer or Moderna.



Keep an Eye Out for Side Effects

Having some symptoms after your vaccination is normal—and common. Here's what to expect.



BY THE NUMBERS

1-2
WEEKS

The time it takes for your body to build up the maximum protection after you're fully vaccinated.

THE TIMING: When symptoms occur, they usually show up one to three days after your shot. With the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, they're more common after your second dose. The most reported side effects include:

- Redness, swelling, and/or pain at the injection site
- Tiredness or fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Joint pain
- Fever
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Swollen lymph nodes

THE SEVERITY: The symptoms can be mild or moderate, and they should resolve within a few days. Good news for older adults: Researchers have found that they're less frequent and less severe among those over the age of 55.

Most of the time, you'll be able to go about your day normally. But some people have reported feeling tired, achy, and feverish. "The morning after my second shot I had flu-like symptoms that lasted 24 hours," says Lynnette Wesolowski, R.N. "On day three, I slept way more than usual, then on the fourth day, I was back to normal. Getting vaccinated was totally worth the side effects."

Remember: Even if you don't feel great after getting the shot, **you cannot get COVID from the vaccine.** It doesn't contain any live virus—only the instructions to help your body protect itself.



AFTER YOUR SHOT

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

By getting vaccinated, you protect yourself, and you help your whole community fight the virus. But we can't give up yet: It's still important to **keep wearing a mask, social distancing, washing hands, and avoiding crowds.** One important reason: Scientists don't know if the shots prevent transmission. It's possible that vaccinated people could still spread the virus to vulnerable folks even though they're not sick themselves.



WANT MORE INFORMATION?

VISIT [ARKANSASBLUECROSS.COM/MEDICARE/MEDICARE-COVID-19-RESOURCES](https://www.arkansasbluecross.com/medicare/medicare-covid-19-resources).

