

COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions

St. Louis County Public Health, along with hospitals and pharmacies throughout the region, are administering COVID-19 vaccines following the guidance of the Minnesota Department of Health. Currently two vaccines – one from Pfizer/BioNTech and the other from Moderna – have been approved for emergency use. The information below is accurate for both vaccines.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccines have undergone rigorous safety testing. Scientists from the FDA and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have reviewed all information from the testing process and determined the vaccine to be safe and 95% effective. All the usual steps have been taken to make sure the COVID-19 vaccines are safe. To speed up the development of the COVID-19 vaccine, drug manufacturers built upon previous research as well as used new and faster methods. Experts continue tracking vaccine safety information once vaccines are given in real-life conditions to make sure they are working as expected.

How does the vaccine work?

The COVID-19 vaccine requires two doses. You will get one shot, and then a second shot 21-28 days later (depending on if the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine is used.) It is necessary to get both doses of the same vaccine to be fully protected. The vaccine does not contain any live or dead COVID-19 virus. Instead, it uses spike protein messenger RNA (mRNA), which teaches your immune system to recognize the COVID-19 virus and destroy it before it can infect you.

What are the side effects or long term effects of the vaccine?

The most common side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines are mild and temporary. They include fatigue, headache, and muscle aches. When mild side effects occur, they are a normal sign your body is building protection to the virus. If these minor side effects occur, it's most likely a day or two after getting the vaccine, and go away in a few days. Because a very small percentage of people who've received the vaccine have experienced an allergic reaction, individuals are asked to wait for 15 minutes at the vaccination site to be monitored by medical staff so they could be treated if necessary. There are no known long term effects from the COVID-19 vaccine.

Can I get COVID-19 from the COVID-19 vaccine?

No. The vaccine does not contain any live or dead version of the virus, so you cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine. The vaccine works because it contains spike protein RNA, which "teaches" the immune system to recognize the COVID-19 virus so it can destroy it before the virus can infect you. The vaccine is safe and is 95% effective for preventing COVID-19.

Will the vaccine change my DNA?

No. The COVID-19 vaccines in use are currently messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines. The mRNA in these vaccines directs the production of specific proteins that your immune system will recognize as viral proteins and subsequently generate a protective immune response. Neither the mRNA nor protein has the ability to change your DNA. The mRNA degenerates soon after the immune response occurs.

Can I get the vaccine if I am pregnant/breastfeeding?

There currently is not a lot of information on this topic. Those pregnant or breastfeeding should speak to their health care provider before getting vaccinated to get a better understanding about what is known about the COVID-19 vaccination and their health benefits/risks.

Does the vaccine cause infertility or sterility?

There is no evidence the vaccine can cause sterility or infertility. There is also no biological mechanism that would lead to sterility or infertility in COVID-19 vaccine recipients. This myth originated from sources and hypotheses not supported by scientific fact.

Does the vaccine contain a microchip or tracking device?

No. This is a myth that has circulated on the internet. The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective and can prevent you from getting a severe case of COVID-19.

Do I have to get vaccinated?

No. The COVID-19 vaccine was approved for use under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). No one can be forced to get vaccinated. However, we strongly encourage you to get the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available to you. Getting vaccinated helps protect you, your family, co-workers, health care providers, residents, patients, and community. Getting vaccinated will help end the damage that COVID-19 is having on the economy, and will help eliminate and eradicate COVID-19 sooner.

If I've had COVID, do I still need to get vaccinated?

You should get vaccinated even if you have had COVID-19. Because of the newness of the virus, it's not known how long a person has immunity after experiencing COVID-19. It's also not known if being previously infected will make the next infection better or worse. If your illness was confirmed by a PCR test in the past 90 days, it is okay to wait to get vaccinated. In order to conserve doses when they are limited, you may be asked to wait for the 90-day period.

Will I ever have to prove I've been vaccinated?

Your vaccination status is your personal data and providers are not able to provide this information to others. However, this information will be available to you to provide to others as proof of vaccination, should an employer or others require this and you are willing to provide your personal vaccination history. No one else is legally able to access your personal vaccination data. Like all personal health information, COVID-19 vaccination status is protected by federal and state law. Vaccine providers and public health agencies can track who is receiving the COVID-19 vaccines to ensure that all vaccinated people receive both doses of the vaccine, and that the most vulnerable populations are offered the vaccines first. Your COVID-19 vaccination status will be entered into the Minnesota Immunization Information Connection. You will also get a card documenting that you received the COVID-19 vaccine.

If I pass on my chance to get vaccinated now, then what?

Once you are deemed eligible to receive the vaccine, you can receive it at any time. Certainly, the longer you wait the more you put yourself at risk for contracting COVID-19, but not getting vaccinated when it's your turn does not mean you can't get vaccinated later.

Do I still need to social distance and wear masks if I get the vaccine?

Yes. For now, even those who've been vaccinated should continue to wear masks and practice other prevention steps. This is because scientists don't yet know for certain if the vaccine prevents asymptomatic virus spread. In other words, the vaccine protects you from getting sick, but it's unclear if a vaccinated person could still spread the virus to others.

How long does the vaccine last?

At this time, we do not know if this will be a vaccine that people need to get again, (like needing a tetanus shot every 10 years or getting a flu shot every year.)

Why should I trust the government on this?

St. Louis County Public health, like all public health agencies, provides unbiased information and resources to residents of the county we serve. COVID-19 vaccines have been produced by non-governmental private companies, and the safety and effectiveness of these vaccines has been monitored by an independent monitoring board. In addition, public health experts at universities, and medical and pharmacy practitioners have uniformly recommended COVID-19 vaccinations for all eligible populations to combat this deadly disease. We encourage you to check with your health care provider to ensure you are getting accurate and up-to-date vaccine information from a credible source.

How soon can I get vaccinated?

The COVID-19 vaccine is currently not available to the general public. Due to limited vaccine availability, St. Louis County Public Health is following the priority list set by the Minnesota Department of Health. For now, this includes health care personnel and long term care facility staff and residents.

St. Louis County Public Health is following three guiding principles in administering vaccines:

- Vaccinating for impact to decrease morbidity and mortality
- Ensuring equitable distribution
- Maintaining transparency throughout the process

The vaccination is free and will eventually be available to everyone. Please be patient.



Want to learn more about the COVID-19 vaccines?

Visit these websites:

- Minnesota Department of Health: health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vaccine/basics.html
- Centers for Disease Control: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html

Or Call the St. Louis County Public Health COVID-19 Information Line: [218-625-3600](tel:218-625-3600)

- Calls are answered/returned Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Note: The information in this document was accurate as of the time of its printing. The situation continues to change rapidly and we will continue to do our best to provide the most up-to-date guidance. We encourage you to review the MDH website (<https://mn.gov/covid19>) regarding this information.

Printed: 1/28/2021