

COVID-19 VACCINE: Q&A WITH DR. ZARINA S. NORTON

Dr. Zarina S. Norton, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Medical Education at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, answers commonly asked questions about the COVID-19 vaccine.



Always check with your clinician if you have concerns about the vaccine. People who have chronic medical conditions, have had serious allergic reactions in the past or have allergies to components of the vaccines, women who are pregnant or nursing and people with compromised immune systems should discuss vaccination with their health care provider prior to vaccination.

WHY SHOULD PEOPLE CONSIDER GETTING VACCINATED?

DR. NORTON (DN): I have reviewed the data and I am very confident recommending the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines, which have been shown to be safe and effective in most people. During clinical trials, the vaccines prevented about 95% of symptomatic COVID-19 infections in the groups studied—meaning you are 95% less likely to get sick from COVID-19 if you are vaccinated with both doses as directed. Getting vaccinated and following [CDC guidance](#) (like masking, physical distancing and washing hands) is the best way to protect yourself, individuals you serve, coworkers and loved ones from getting seriously ill from COVID-19.

DO THE VACCINES HAVE SIDE EFFECTS?

DN: The most common side effects reported are soreness at the injection site, muscle aches, feeling tired or mild fever, typically lasting 1-2 days. These are signs that your body is responding to the vaccine as expected. Serious side effects are very rare. Allergic reactions to the vaccines are rare, but can happen.



HOW WERE THE VACCINES DEVELOPED?

DN: The pandemic created an urgent need for a response, and billions of dollars were invested by governments, individuals and organizations to create a vaccine. More than 200 companies joined the effort. These vaccines are subject to the same rigorous safety standards as any other vaccine. Large trials were conducted with tens of thousands of participants, and since December, [millions more people](#) have received the vaccine in the United States.



DO THE VACCINES CONTAIN LIVE VIRUS?

DN: No. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are mRNA vaccines. Our bodies make mRNA all the time—it tells our cells how to make proteins. In this case, the vaccine tells your cells to make tiny pieces of one of the proteins in the COVID-19 virus. Those pieces of protein trigger your body's immune response and prepare your body to fight off the virus should you be

exposed later. The vaccines do NOT inject the virus into the body or cause the body to make the virus. The vaccine CANNOT cause or spread COVID-19.

DO I NEED BOTH DOSES OF THE VACCINE?

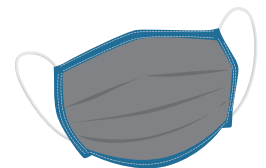
DN: [The current recommendation is to receive both doses of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine for maximum protection.](#) After receiving one dose of the vaccine, you will only be partially protected from COVID-19. You will build up the maximum amount of protection about 1-2 weeks after receiving the second dose of the vaccine.

I ALREADY HAD COVID-19. SHOULD I STILL GET THE VACCINE?

DN: [The vaccine should be offered to you even if you already had a COVID-19 infection.](#) The vaccine may provide additional protection that infection does not.

SHOULD I STILL WEAR A MASK AFTER GETTING VACCINATED?

DN: Yes. We do not know if vaccination will prevent asymptomatic infection or transmission of the virus from person to person. And while the vaccines are very effective, they are not 100% effective, so it is still possible to get infected. That's why it's important to continue all COVID-19 precautions whether or not you've been vaccinated, including wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) when providing direct care, wearing a mask, maintaining physical distance, hand washing and avoiding group gatherings. We need to use every tool we have to stop the spread of the virus and bring the pandemic to an end.



“Getting vaccinated and following CDC guidance is the best way to protect yourself, individuals you serve, coworkers and loved ones from getting seriously ill from COVID-19.”

-Dr. Zarina Norton