

Frequently Asked Questions about the COVID-19 Vaccines: Information for Residents of Correctional Facilities



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COVID-19 VACCINES: THE BASICS

- Vaccines teach the immune system how to recognize and fight off the virus that causes COVID-19. This can prevent vaccinated people from getting sick.
- When you get the vaccine you also protect other people around you by making it less likely for them to get COVID-19. Vaccines are not used to treat people who currently have COVID-19.
- There are currently three vaccines available in the United States, made by the drug companies Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson.
- The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines both have two shots that are given three weeks apart (Pfizer) or four weeks apart (Moderna). The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is one shot.
- All three vaccines are **SAFE** and **HIGHLY EFFECTIVE** at **preventing serious illness and death from COVID-19**.
- The vaccines have been given to tens of millions of people and have a strong record of safety.
- While it may seem like the vaccines were developed in record time, the science has been in development for many years and they have gone through all of the steps required for any vaccine to be approved.

SAFETY & EFFICACY

How effective are each of the three vaccines at preventing COVID-19?

- All three vaccines are **highly effective at preventing serious illness and death** due to COVID-19. Nearly 60,000 people were fully vaccinated in studies of the three vaccines and only one fully vaccinated person was hospitalized with COVID-19.
- The initial research shows that the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines were more than 90% effective in preventing mild COVID-19 illness, while Johnson & Johnson was 66% effective. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine was studied in locations where more contagious COVID-19 variants (“strains”) were circulating, so it is not possible to directly compare the original vaccine trials.
- Because all three vaccines are effective and limited in supply, **doctors and public health experts recommend taking whichever vaccine is available to you first.**

Are the vaccines effective against the “variant forms” of COVID-19?

- Yes. So far research suggests all 3 vaccines protect from serious illness and death caused by COVID-19 variants (“strains”), including the “Delta” variant.
- Research suggests the vaccines are slightly less effective against the variants (like Delta), but **all three vaccines are still >90% effective at preventing serious illness and death.** The Delta variant has caused more “breakthrough infections” in vaccinated people than the original COVID-19 virus, but most people have mild disease (showing the vaccines are working). Nearly all hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19 in California are now among unvaccinated people.

Will the vaccines work against all future variants?

- Viruses constantly change their DNA (or “mutate”). This can cause new variants (also called “strains”). Scientists monitor these variants to identify any that spread easily or are resistant to vaccines.
- Four key variants being monitored in the US are more contagious than the original COVID-19 strain (Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta). The most common currently is Delta, which was first found in India. It is now the most infectious form of COVID-19 right now. **Most serious infections with Delta are in unvaccinated people.**
- Since viruses mutate often, there will be more COVID variants in the future. However, **variants are less likely to develop when most of the population is vaccinated (>80%).**
- It is impossible to predict whether the vaccines will work against variants that do not yet exist. However, it is reassuring that so far they are effective against the current strains.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe? Should I worry that they were developed so quickly?

- All vaccines were found to be safe and effective in tens of thousands of adults (including Black and Latinx people) who participated in high quality research – the same research that any new vaccine or medicine must undergo before it is approved.
- Since the original research studies, hundreds of millions of doses of the vaccines have been given and further studies have confirmed they are safe and effective.

Are the vaccines approved by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA)?

- The FDA has allowed use of 3 vaccines under Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) which requires a thorough review process and strict standards.
- The COVID-19 vaccines have gone through all of the steps required for any vaccine to be approved. It takes a very long time for the FDA to go through its full process; the final approval is expected this year. Because there is so much data that the

vaccines are safe, we do not recommend waiting to get vaccinated until FDA approval.

Did Amend staff get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. All Amend team members received the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it was offered to them.

SIDE EFFECTS & MEDICAL QUESTIONS

What are the possible side effects of the vaccines?

- The most common vaccine side effects are arm soreness, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, and fever. These side effects are more common after the second vaccine dose (for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines) and – if they occur – should stop within 2 days.
- These symptoms are **normal**, they are a sign that your immune system is building protection against COVID-19!
- Among the millions of people who have received COVID-19 vaccines, a very small number of people have experienced severe allergic reactions (~2-5 people per million). If you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine or other substance, you should tell the health care professionals giving you the vaccine.
- Now that hundreds of millions of people have received the vaccine, we are seeing some extremely rare but serious reactions that might be caused by the vaccine such as blood clots (“thrombosis” and “thrombocytopenia syndrome”), heart inflammation (“myocarditis”) and neurologic disease (Guillain-Barré). See below for more info.

What about serious side effects such as blood clots?

- Out of the 13 million people who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine by July 2021, 39 people developed unusual blood clots within four weeks of getting the vaccine (~3 people out of 1 million vaccines given). These blood clots are very serious and nearly all were in women younger than 50 years old.
- Three people died of these clots. For comparison, remember that COVID-19 is a very dangerous disease. For every 1 million unvaccinated people who get COVID-19, about 18,000 people will die. Because these blood clots are extremely rare and COVID-19 is very dangerous, medical experts recommend getting the vaccine.

What about heart inflammation (myocarditis)?

- As of July 2021, over 600 cases of myocarditis occurred in people several days after receiving the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine (~3.5 people per 1 million). Fewer cases were seen in patients over the age of 30 compared to those under the age of 30.
- Myocarditis can also be caused by infections (including COVID-19) and immune disease. Researchers are still trying to understand whether or not the vaccine caused myocarditis in these patients.

What about neurological disease (Guillain-Barré Syndrome)?

- Guillain-Barré Syndrome is a rare disease where the body’s immune system attacks nerve cells and causes weakness and sometimes paralysis. Most people fully recover but some have permanent nerve damage.
- Out of the 13 million people who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine by July 2021, approximately 100 people developed Guillain-Barré within two weeks of vaccination (7 per 1 million vaccines given). Most cases were in men 50 years or older. Researchers are trying to determine whether or not the vaccine caused Guillain-Barré in these patients.

Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccines?

- **No.** Because of how the vaccines work, **it is impossible to get COVID-19 from the vaccines.** The vaccines also cannot make you test positive for COVID-19.
- Even if you have been vaccinated, if you have a cough, fever, or other symptoms, then there is a chance you could have COVID-19, and you should ask to speak to medical staff right away.

I have diabetes, high blood pressure, hepatitis C, and/or HIV. Is it safe to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- Yes. It is safe for people with diabetes and high blood pressure to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. It is also safe for people with other health conditions such as hepatitis C, HIV, and cancer to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Only people who have had allergies to ingredients of the COVID-19 vaccine in the past should potentially not receive the vaccine – if this is the case for you, ask your doctor!
- None of the vaccines contain eggs, gelatin, latex or any preservatives.

If I already had COVID-19, do I need to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- Yes. You should get the vaccine even if you have already been infected with COVID-19.
- Most people who have gotten sick with COVID-19 are protected for at least a couple months after the illness. Researchers have compared the immune protection from COVID-19 infection to the vaccine and found that the protection from the vaccine is stronger and lasts longer.

How do I know if I have one of these rare but serious side effects related to the vaccine?

- If you received a vaccine within the last month and have a severe headache, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling, severe abdominal pain, or weakness and tingling in your feet that spreads up your legs, you should contact a health care provider immediately. **Keep in mind these side effects are extremely rare.**

If I have already been fully vaccinated, do I need a booster shot?

- Right now researchers are studying this question and the answer is unknown.
- Many vaccines need to be given more than once (for example tetanus is given every ten years and the flu shot is given yearly). There are a couple reasons why we expect boosters might be necessary for COVID-19:
 - It is possible that the protection from the vaccine will decrease over time and a booster will help remind your immune system how to fight COVID-19.
 - It is possible that a booster will be necessary to help your body fight new COVID variants.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINES

I heard that some of the officers, warden or health care staff are refusing to get the vaccine, why should I?

Reasons that people don't get the vaccine include not knowing how safe and effective they are, a lack of understanding about COVID-19 itself, mistrust of the medical system, and more. We encourage you to empower yourself by learning as much as you can about the COVID-19 vaccines, and making your own decision about getting the vaccine based on facts, and regardless of what other people are doing.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine harm my fertility?

No. There is no evidence that the vaccine affects the fertility of men or women. There is also no evidence of infertility caused by the COVID-19 virus among the many millions of men and women who have recovered from COVID-19.

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are mRNA vaccines. Does that mean they change your DNA (also called your genetic code)?

- The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines both use "messenger RNA" (also called mRNA) to teach the cells in your body to recognize the outside part of the COVID-19 virus (called the spike protein). That way, if you are exposed to the virus, your immune system will attack the virus and stop it from making you sick.
- The COVID-19 vaccine **does not change your DNA**. mRNA cannot combine with your DNA.

Do the vaccines contain fetal tissue?

- None of the vaccines contain fetal tissue.

The Amend team and our partners on this FAQ all support vaccination. See page 4 for our partner list.

***AMEND at the University of California, San Francisco**, draws on the principles of public health and human rights to bring transformative change to incarceration in the U.S. Our mission is to create stronger communities by transforming prisons and jails into places of rehabilitation, healing and health.*

MORE RESOURCES

Ask your friends or family to get more information about COVID-19 vaccines at these trusted sites:

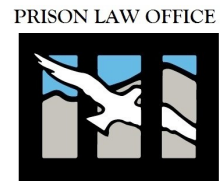
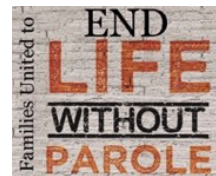
<https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvncqnojDU>

- If you or your loved ones have more questions we should answer on the next version of this FAQ, email us at info@amend.us or write to AMEND, 490 Illinois St, Floor 8, UCSF Box 1265, San Francisco, CA 94143.
- **If you are in California**, you can also call the **Transitions Clinic Network Reentry Healthcare Hotline** to speak to a community health worker with a history of incarceration. This hotline accepts collect calls from California state prisons and county jails that use GTL. The hotline is open M-F, 9-5pm. Call: 510-606-6400. If available, you can also contact them via JPAY at tcninfo@ucsf.edu

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>
 State of California COVID-19 Vaccine Information Center <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>
 UCSF COVID-19 Vaccine Information Hub <https://coronavirus.ucsf.edu/vaccines>

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Prisonerreentrynetwork.org

