DSHS COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs

Categories:

Basics

How are the COVID-19 vaccines different from other vaccines?
Different types of vaccines work in different ways to offer protection. But every type of vaccine works by teaching our bodies how to make cells that trigger an immune response. That immune response, which produces antibodies, is what protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies.

Currently, there are three main types of COVID-19 vaccines that are or soon will be undergoing large-scale (Phase 3) clinical trials in the United States:

- mRNA vaccines
- Protein subunit vaccines
- Vector vaccines

COVID-19 vaccines do not use the live virus and cannot give you COVID-19. The vaccine does not alter your DNA. COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an immune response without having to experience sickness.

Learn more about how COVID-19 vaccines work on the Understanding How COVID-19 Vaccines Work section of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website.

Why should I take the COVID-19 vaccine?
Getting this vaccine once it is available to you represents one step that you can take to get the Texas economy, and our day-to-day lives, back to normal.

How do I know whether the COVID-19 vaccine is safe?
Safety is a top priority while federal partners work to make COVID-19 vaccines available. The new COVID-19 vaccines have been evaluated in tens of thousands of volunteers during clinical trials. The vaccines are only authorized for use if they are found to be safe.

Even though they found no safety issues during the clinical trials, CDC and other federal partners will continue to monitor the new vaccines. They watch out for serious side effects (or "adverse events") using vaccine safety monitoring systems, like the new V-safe After Vaccination Health Checker app.

For the most up-to-date information, see the Vaccine Safety section of the CDC website.

To learn about CDC's new vaccine safety monitoring system, see the V-safe After Vaccination Health Checker section of the CDC website.

Planning and Distribution

Who decides how many vaccines Texas gets?
CDC determines how many doses of vaccine Texas will receive each week, based on population. Once the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is notified of the number of doses expected the following week, DSHS staff presents possibilities for vaccine distribution to the Expert Vaccine Allocation Panel (EVAP). The panel makes modifications and recommendations to the Commissioner of Health, who makes the final decision on that week's distribution.

Who decides how to distribute the vaccine in Texas?
In Texas, DSHS distributes the vaccine with the guidance of the EVAP, appointed by the Health Commissioner, Dr. John Hellerstedt.

How did DSHS decide who to immunize first?
The Commissioner of Health appointed an EVAP to make recommendations on vaccine allocation decisions. This includes identifying groups that should be vaccinated first. The goal is to provide the most protection to vulnerable populations and critical state resources.

EVAP developed seven guiding principles of how Texas will allocate COVID-19 vaccines, which will be in limited supply as they roll out. Those principles are to:

- **Protect healthcare workers** who care for and preserve the lives of COVID-19 patients and keep our healthcare system working.
- **Protect front-line workers,** who are at high risk of getting COVID-19 because they provide critical services.
- **Protect the vulnerable,** who are at high risk of severe disease and death if they get COVID-19.
- **Reduce risks** for Texans who may be at risk because of their race or ethnicity, where they live, limited income and healthcare coverage, and other factors.
- **Distribute vaccines** according to current science and data. Adjust as knowledge evolves.
- **Geographic diversity** through a balanced approach in urban and rural communities and in affected ZIP codes.
- **Transparency** with the public and seeking public input.

So, who will get the COVID-19 vaccine first?
The EVAP recommended, and Dr. Hellerstedt approved, that Phase 1A and Phase 1B be the first Texans vaccinated.

On December 29, 2020, the Texas Commissioner of Health Dr. John Hellerstedt said, "All providers that have received COVID-19 vaccine must immediately vaccinate healthcare workers, Texans over the age of 65, and people with medical conditions that put them at a greater risk of severe disease or death from COVID-19. No vaccine should be kept in reserve."

Phase 1A includes front-line healthcare workers and residents of long-term care facilities like nursing homes and assisted living facilities and became eligible to receive the vaccine on December 14, 2020. Phase 1A consists of two tiers, described below. These tiers do not necessarily indicate the order of vaccination.

First Tier
The first tier of distribution includes five groups.

- **Hospital staff** working directly with patients who are positive or at high risk for COVID-19. This includes doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists and other support staff (custodial staff, etc.). This also includes clinical staff providing lab, pharmacy, diagnostic and/or rehab services.

- **Long-term care staff** who work directly with residents at nursing homes and assisted living centers. It includes doctors, nurses, and personal-care assistants as well as custodial workers and food service staff.

- **Emergency Medical Service (EMS) workers** who provide 9-1-1 emergency services like pre-hospital care and transport.

- **Home health workers, including hospice care,** who directly care for vulnerable and high-risk patients.

- **Residents of long-term care facilities.** This group includes anyone living in a long-term care facility.

Second Tier
The second tier of distribution consists of six groups.

- **Outpatient care staff** who interact with sick patients. This includes doctors, nurses, and other staff. It also includes clinical staff who provide diagnostic, lab, rehab, and transportation services.

- **Free-standing emergency clinic staff** who provide direct care in free standing emergency medical care facilities and urgent care clinics**.**

- **Community pharmacy employees** who provide clinical services. This includes pharmacy staff who may vaccinate or test those who may have COVID-19.

- **Public health and emergency staff** who administer COVID-19 tests and vaccines.

- **Last responders** who provide mortuary or death services to the deceased with COVID-19. This group includes mortuary and related services, such as embalmers, funeral home workers and medical examiners.

- **School nurses** who provide health care to students and faculty.

Those in Phase 1B are also eligible to get the COVID-19 vaccine, depending on availability and the vaccine provider. Vaccine supply remains limited, but more vaccine will be delivered to providers each week. Phase 1B recipients include:

- People 65 years of age and older
- People 16 years of age and older with at least one chronic medical condition that puts them at increased risk for severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19, such as but not limited to:
    - Cancer
    - Chronic kidney disease
    - COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
    - Heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathies
    - Solid organ transplantation
    - Obesity and severe obesity (body mass index of 30 kg/m2 or higher)
    - Pregnancy
    - Sickle cell disease
    - Type 2 diabetes mellitus

This list does not necessarily indicate the order of vaccination.

If you are in Phase 1A or 1B, visit the Texas COVID-19 Vaccine Provider Locations map to see if and where you might be able to get a vaccine today. Remember, your ability to get a vaccine will depend on vaccine availability at your provider's office, clinic, pharmacy or other healthcare facility.

Texans wanting a vaccine should not visit a hospital or other vaccine provider searching for a vaccine. Visit the hospital's website or other vaccine provider's website to see when the vaccine may be available. If you cannot locate that information online, then call ahead. Note that supply is still limit even though Texas is receiving additional vaccine every week.

Why will certain groups be next to get the COVID-19 vaccine instead of teachers, grocery store workers, bus drivers and so on?
Vaccinating people at an increased risk of getting very sick or dying from COVID-19 protects the most vulnerable people, regardless of their occupation. This preserves life and reduces the strain on the healthcare system.

The EVAP is considering additional populations for getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

How does Texas decide the order of populations who receive the COVID-19 vaccine?
EVAP has identified which groups will be vaccinated during early phases. The EVAP is considering additional populations for getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

When will everyone else get it? When can I get mine?
Spring 2021 is the best estimate of when vaccine will be available for the general public, but that may change. It depends on vaccine production and how quickly other vaccines become available.

Visit the Texas COVID-19 Vaccine Provider Locations map to see if and where you might be able to get a vaccine today. Remember, your ability to get a vaccine will depend on vaccine availability at your provider's office, clinic, pharmacy or other healthcare facility.

Texans wanting a vaccine should not visit a hospital or other vaccine provider searching for a vaccine. Visit the hospital's website or other vaccine provider's website to see when the vaccine may be available. If you cannot locate that information online, then call ahead. Note that supply is still limit even though Texas is receiving additional vaccine every week.

If I am in a priority group, how do I get a COVID-19 vaccine?
If you are a healthcare worker, contact your employer. If you are a long-term care resident, contact your caretaker (Phase 1A Tiers 1 and 2).

If you are 65 or older, or if you are 16 or older with an underlying health condition (Phase 1B), visit the Texas COVID-19 Vaccine Provider Locations map to see providers near you who are offering the vaccine. Texans wanting a vaccine should not visit a hospital or other vaccine provider searching for a

vaccine. Visit the hospital's website or other vaccine provider's website to see when the vaccine may be available. If you cannot locate that information online, then call ahead. Note that supply is still limit even though Texas is receiving additional vaccine every week.

Who can provide vaccines, and how does that happen?
Any facility, organization or healthcare provider licensed to possess or administer vaccine or provide vaccination services is eligible to enroll as a COVID-19 vaccine provider. Each facility or location, including those that are part of a hospital system or clinic network, must register at EnrollTexasIZ.dshs.texas.gov and complete the CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program Provider Agreement.

Timing will depend on the amount of vaccine provided to Texas and the uptake of vaccine among the priority populations in Phase 1A and 1B.

What should I do to protect myself and others before a vaccine is available?
Practice the same safety habits you've been doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Take the following precautions to limit exposure for yourself and others:

- Wear a mask or cloth face covering in public and when around people who don't live in your household, especially when social distancing is not possible.
- Practice social distancing and avoid close contact with others:
  - **Outside your home:** Stay at least 6 feet away from others and avoid crowded places.
  - **Inside your home:** Avoid close contact with household members who are sick. Avoid sharing personal items and use a separate room and bathroom for sick household members, if possible.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean and disinfect frequently-touched objects and surfaces using a household disinfectant on List N: Disinfectants for COVID-19.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.

Effectiveness

Will vaccines prevent people from getting and spreading COVID-19?
COVID-19 vaccines are new and are still being evaluated. Some COVID-19 vaccines may prevent severe illness, while others may prevent people from getting COVID-19 altogether. Others may be effective to prevent spreading COVID-19. CDC and DSHS will keep the public informed as they learn more.

How effective will the vaccine be against COVID-19, and for how long?
Different vaccines are proving to have different efficacy rates. Some manufacturers are reporting 90% to 95% protection at 1–2 weeks after receiving the final dose. At this time, experts do not know how long protection will last or whether a booster shot will be necessary later, after the initial recommended vaccine dose(s). CDC and DSHS will keep the public informed as they learn more.

After we get vaccinated, will we still need to wear a mask or cloth face covering and socially distance?
Yes. Experts are still learning about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions. The vaccine is not expected to be 100% effective. At this time, CDC recommends that everyone continue to use all the tools to protect ourselves and others from getting and spreading the virus. Wear a mask or cloth face covering whenever you are out in public or when around people who don't live in your household. These masks or face coverings help when you can't avoid being in the same space as others.

Wearing a mask or cloth face covering does ***not*** mean you don't need to stay a safe distance from others. Social distancing, or staying at least 6 feet apart from others, is still necessary to keep you and others safe.

How long will I have to wear a mask, stay six feet from others and wash my hands?
Experts at CDC are learning about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions. So, once you get vaccinated, keep

wearing your mask, washing your hands and staying six feet from others until you hear differently from CDC and DSHS.

Immunity

Will the immunity after getting COVID-19 last longer than the protection provided by the vaccine?

We are still learning about how long a recovered person is protected by "natural immunity." Early evidence suggests that immunity after having COVID-19 may not last very long.

We also don't know yet how long the vaccines' protection lasts, called "vaccine-induced immunity." CDC and DSHS will keep the public informed as more information becomes available.

Will we ever achieve "herd immunity" in Texas?

Experts are still learning about what percentage of Texans would need to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity. This term describes when enough people have protection, either from a previous infection or from vaccination, that it is unlikely a virus or bacteria can spread between people in a community and cause disease. The percentage needed to reach herd immunity varies by disease. CDC and DSHS will keep the public informed as more information becomes available.

Getting Vaccinated

Do I need to get vaccinated if I've already recovered from COVID-19?

Yes. Immunity from the COVID-19 vaccine may last longer than the natural immunity you get if you've already had COVID-19.

People who currently have COVID-19 should not be vaccinated while being sick.

Does everyone have to get vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine?

No. Getting vaccinated is voluntary and cannot be required since the vaccine is being distributed under an emergency use authorization (EUA). Once the vaccines are fully licensed, different laws may apply. Regardless, getting

vaccinated against COVID-19 is another way to protect yourself and others from getting and spreading COVID-19.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine be one or two shots? How long after the first dose do I take the second one?
All but one of the COVID-19 vaccines currently in development need two shots to be effective. You need two doses from the same manufacturer, spaced 21 or 28 days apart. You will get full protection from the vaccine usually 1–2 weeks after getting your second dose.

At this time, experts do not know how long protection will last or whether a booster shot will be necessary later, after the initial recommended vaccine dose(s). CDC and DSHS will keep the public informed as they learn more.

Can I just take one of the two doses?
For all but one of the COVID-19 vaccines currently in development, you will need two shots for full protection. You will need two doses from the same manufacturer, spaced 21 or 28 days apart, depending on the vaccine manufacturer. You will get full protection from the vaccine usually 1–2 weeks after getting your second dose. Get the second shot even if you have side effects from the first shot, unless the vaccination provider or your healthcare provider tells you not to get the shot.

When you get the vaccine, you will receive information about what kind of vaccine you got and when you need to come back for your second dose. You can register and use the new V-safe After Vaccination Health Checker to receive health check-ins after you receive a COVID-19 vaccination, as well as reminders to get your second dose if you need one.

If you choose to get only one dose, the amount of protection you may have is not known.

Which vaccine should I get for COVID-19? Do I have a choice?
You always have a choice about your health care. Talk to a healthcare provider to get information specific to your situation.

Does the vaccine I choose depend on my age or underlying conditions?
Different COVID-19 vaccines may be more suitable for certain people. Your age and/or underlying conditions may also affect when you are eligible to get the vaccine. Talk to a healthcare provider to get information specific to you and the COVID-19 vaccine.

How long after I get the COVID-19 vaccine before I am protected?
For the two-dose vaccines, the process of getting fully vaccinated takes over a month in total. You will get full protection from the vaccine usually 1–2 weeks after getting your second dose.

Talk to a healthcare provider to get information specific to your COVID-19 vaccine.

Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I have COVID-19?
Talk to your healthcare provider about the timing of your vaccination(s) if you have been sick with COVID-19.

What are some side effects from the vaccines for COVID-19?
COVID-19 vaccines are associated with a number of side effects, but almost all of them are mild. They include pain and redness at the injection site, fatigue, headache, body aches and even fever.

Having symptoms like fever after you get a vaccine is normal and a sign your immune system is building protection against the virus. The side effects from COVID-19 vaccination may feel like flu, but they should go away in a few days.

If you get the vaccine and experience severe side effects or ones that do not go away in a couple of days, contact your healthcare provider for further instructions on how to take care of yourself.

You can register and use the new V-safe After Vaccination Health Checker to receive health check-ins after you receive a COVID-19 vaccination, as well as reminders to get your second dose if you need one.

To learn what side effects to expect and get helpful tips on how to reduce pain and discomfort after your vaccination, visit the What to Expect after Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine section of the CDC website.

Does the vaccine react poorly with any medications, or do the prescriptions I'm taking preclude me from being able to get a vaccine?
You will need to check with your healthcare provider about whether your medication will interfere with being vaccinated.

Safety

How do I report it if I have a bad reaction to a vaccine?
CDC has a new smartphone-based tool for this effort called v-safe. This tool helps CDC check in on people's health after they receive a COVID-19 vaccine. When you get your vaccine, you should also receive a v-safe information sheet telling you how to enroll in v-safe. If you enroll, you will get regular text messages directing you to surveys. Use these surveys to report any problems or adverse reactions you have after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

Read about v-safe with the V-safe Information Sheet (PDF).

According to CDC's website, CDC and FDA encourage the public to report possible side effects (called adverse events) to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). This national system collects these data to look for adverse events. Those may include ones that are unexpected, ones that appear to happen more often than expected or ones that have unusual patterns of occurrence. Reports to VAERS help CDC monitor the safety of vaccines. Safety is a top priority.

For more information about the difference between a vaccine side effect and an adverse event, visit the Understanding Side Effects and Adverse Events section of the CDC website.

For more information about the reporting system, visit the VAERS website or call 800-822-7967.

You should also let your doctor know about your reaction. According to CDC, healthcare providers will need to report some vaccine side effects to VAERS.

Can the COVID-19 vaccine make me sick or give me COVID-19?
No. COVID-19 vaccines do not use the live virus and cannot give you COVID-19. The vaccine does not alter your DNA. COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an immune response without having to experience sickness.

To learn about COVID-19 vaccines, visit the Different COVID-19 Vaccines section of the CDC website.

Can children get the vaccine, or will they rely on their natural immune system to protect them?
At this time, experts do not know how safe the COVID-19 vaccine is for children. People 16 years old and older are currently eligible to get the vaccine if they are in a priority population.

Can pregnant women get the vaccine?
At this time, experts do not know how safe the COVID-19 vaccine is for people who are pregnant. Data from studies are limited. But experts believe COVID-19 vaccines are unlikely to pose a risk to people who are pregnant. If you are pregnant and are eligible to get the vaccine, you may choose to get vaccinated. Discuss your options and any concerns with your healthcare provider.

For more information about COVID-19 vaccines and pregnancy, visit the Vaccination Considerations for People who are Pregnant or Breastfeeding section of the CDC website.

More Information

Where can I get reliable information about vaccines for COVID-19?
Three excellent sources of reliable information are the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

DSHS

COVID-19 Vaccine Information

CDC

COVID-19 Vaccines

COVID-19 Vaccine Safety

Eight Things to Know about the U.S. COVID-19 Vaccination Program

What to Expect after Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine

V-safe After Vaccination Health Checker

FDA

FDA Homepage

COVID-19 Vaccines