



TULARE COUNTY HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

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FAQs: COVID-19 Booster Vaccines

Will booster vaccines help prevent infection from the Omicron variant?

The Omicron variant appears to be much more contagious than even the Delta variant so it is very important that everyone age 12 years and older get their booster vaccine once eligible. Current vaccines are expected to protect against severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths due to infection with the Omicron variant. However, breakthrough infections in people who are fully vaccinated are likely to occur—recent data suggests that the booster vaccine provides much more protection and breakthrough infection with Omicron is much less likely in persons who get a booster vaccine. To remain as protected as possible, everyone should get a booster vaccine as soon as they are eligible.

Vaccination is still recommended even when people have had COVID-19 because it boosts protection and prevents reinfection. Recent data suggests that prior infection is not as protective and that there may be higher rates of reinfection with Omicron than prior variants.

Why are booster vaccines recommended? Is the vaccine not working?

The vaccines continue to be very effective at preventing hospitalization and death from COVID-19. Data shows that the vaccines' effectiveness has started to lessen in preventing infections (or getting COVID-19 if you are exposed to it). This is likely due to several factors like differences in people's bodies building up and sustaining a strong immune response over time (or differences in people's ability to fight off COVID-19 if exposed) and how new variants of the virus are much more contagious. Because of this new information, booster doses are now recommended to help ensure people have ongoing protection.

Booster vaccines are normal in most vaccine series. Most childhood vaccines require boosters as the child gets older to make sure they remain protected and help "give a reminder" to the body's immune system.

When should I get a booster vaccine?

Persons should get a booster vaccine as soon as they are eligible. Currently, they are strongly recommended for all persons age 12 years and older: 5 months after the last Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna and 2 months after the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Which booster vaccine should I get?

CDC now advises that Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines are preferred overall for adults over Johnson & Johnson vaccine unless there is a medical reason someone cannot receive them. This is because Johnson & Johnson vaccine may be associated with higher risk of a rare clotting disorder (TTS) and Guillan-Barre syndrome in certain adults.

Persons may get a brand that is different from their primary series due to personal preference, their provider's advice, or whatever brand is available at the time. Primary vaccine series (e.g. the two Pfizers



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and the two Modernas) should still be with the same vaccine brand—the mixing and matching option is only for boosters.

Can minors get booster vaccines?

Booster doses have been authorized and are strongly recommended for ages 12 years and older at this time.

Are booster vaccines different than the original COVID-19 vaccines?

These booster vaccines are the same vaccine given in primary vaccine series (they are not a different formulation). The only exception is that for the Moderna booster where only half the usual dose is given for the booster.

Do I have to get a booster vaccine?

No, they are strongly recommended for everyone age 12 years and older once eligible so they can be as protected as possible. While the primary series retains effectiveness in protecting the individual from severe illness and death, protection decreases over time so those without booster doses are at higher risk of getting infected after an exposure than those who received boosters.

For this reason, some employers may have requirements and it may impact other areas where vaccination status is considered. For example, whether someone has had their booster or not may also determine whether they need to quarantine after an exposure. It may also impact activities like visitation in high-risk facilities such as nursing homes.

Do I have to bring proof of eligibility to get a booster vaccine?

No, everyone age 12 years and older is recommended to get a booster vaccine once they are eligible. You should bring your vaccine card to your appointment so it can be updated.

Does the booster vaccine have to be the same type or the same brand as what I got before?

No. A single booster dose of any of the available COVID-19 vaccines can be given, but Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech are preferred over Johnson & Johnson.

Can I get a booster vaccine early?

There is not an established benefit for getting a booster earlier than recommended. The timeframe for boosters is *at least* 5 months from the last mRNA vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna) or at least 2 months after the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Does the booster vaccine have side effects?

The possible side effects are similar to the primary series vaccines. Common side effects include a sore /arm, body aches, headaches, or fever/chills. If they occur, they are usually mild and go away on their own within a few days.



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Can I get a booster vaccine at the same time as a flu shot or other vaccine?

Yes. You do not have to wait time between shots. Your arm may feel a little sorer if you get them in the same arm and/or you may feel a little more of the expected side effects.

If I get a booster vaccine, can I stop wearing a mask?

Currently in California, all persons are required to wear a mask when indoors in public through February 15th regardless of their vaccination status. This is because of the concerns for increased transmission during the holidays and high contagiousness of the Omicron variant.

Aside from the requirement, it has remained recommended that all persons continue to wear masks when indoors around persons who are not in their household. This is especially recommended for persons who are higher risk and those who live with higher risk persons (e.g. elderly persons, persons with health problems or weaker immune systems, etc.) to make sure they stay protected.

Do immunocompromised people get booster vaccines?

Immunocompromised persons who received an additional dose of Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna (dose #3) are eligible for a booster vaccine 5 months after that dose. If you have questions, you should ask your family doctor or specialist.

Should I bring my vaccine card to my appointment?

Yes, bring your vaccine card so it can be updated.

Where are booster vaccines available?

Booster vaccines are available at any location where COVID-19 vaccines are available. All locations may not carry all vaccine types—persons should ask about availability when they make an appointment if they have a vaccine preference.

Can I get a booster vaccine if I am pregnant or am wanting to become pregnant?

Yes and all eligible persons in the family including partners should be vaccinated too. Pregnant persons are more likely to get severely sick with COVID-19, so it is very important they are protected as soon as possible. Ask your OB-GYN if you have questions about the vaccine and your health.

If I didn't get my second dose on time, can I still get the vaccine?

Yes, it is OK to get your second dose of Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna even if it is more than 28 days from the first dose. It is important to get it ASAP so you can be as protected as possible. You would be eligible for a booster vaccine 5 months after your second dose.

Should I get a vaccine if I have already had COVID-19?

Yes. The vaccine is recommended regardless of whether you have had COVID-19 or not. It is unknown how long potential protection from infection may last and so far, data shows that vaccination provides better and more reliable protection than the infection. One CDC study showed that unvaccinated people



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who already had COVID-19 were more than 2 times as likely to get COVID-19 again compared to fully vaccinated people. Recent data suggests that the risk of reinfection with Omicron seems to even higher.

You should not get a COVID-19 vaccine if you were recently exposed or diagnosed with COVID-19; you should wait until quarantine or isolation is complete. You should also not get a COVID-19 vaccine if you received monoclonal antibody treatment within the last 90 days or if you or your child were diagnosed with MIS-C or MIS-A (complications from COVID-19 infection) within the last 90 days.

Where can I go for more information?

Centers for Disease Control, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), and California Department of Public Health are good resources with a lot more information on vaccines and COVID-19.

-CDC and ACIP booster info: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster-shot.html>

-CDPH booster Q&A: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Vaccine-Booster-QA.aspx>

	Pfizer-BioNTech	Moderna	Johnson & Johnson / Janssen
Age	5 yo+	18 yo+	18 yo+
Dose 1	Dose 1 of 2 (not protected yet)	Dose 1 of 2 (not protected yet)	Single dose *fully vaccinated after 2 wks*
Dose 2	at least 21 days from dose 1 *fully vaccinated after 2 wks*	at least 28 days from dose 1 *fully vaccinated after 2 wks*	---
Dose 3	<i>Immunocompromised only</i> at least 28 days from dose 2	<i>Immunocompromised only</i> at least 28 days from dose 2	---
Booster Dose	At least 5 months from last dose	At least 5 months from last dose	At least 2 months from last dose
Booster recommended	All 12 yo+	All 18yo+	All persons 18yo+ who got J&J, mRNA vaccines preferred
Mix-and-match boosters	No specific guidance on whether to get Pfizer or Moderna booster. J&J is no longer preferred per CDC.	No specific guidance on whether to get Pfizer or Moderna booster. J&J is no longer preferred per CDC.	mRNA vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna) are preferred due to J&J's associated risk of TTS and GBS in certain adults per CDC.
FDA EUA for patients	https://www.fda.gov/media/14414/download	https://www.fda.gov/media/144638/download	https://www.fda.gov/media/146305/download