

# EHHOP Newsletter

East Harlem Health Outreach Partnership

## Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19 Vaccines

*From the Mount Sinai Hospital*

### *Is the vaccine widely available?*

Not immediately. At first it will be in very limited supply and available to only certain groups of people. It will become available to some parts of the public sometime in early 2021.



### *How do I know a vaccine is safe?*

The FDA reviews all vaccines for safety before allowing them onto the market. In New York State, the Governor's Clinical Advisory Task Force will also offer an independent opinion about each vaccine's safety and efficacy.

### *Will taking the vaccine give me COVID-19?*

No. Neither the Pfizer vaccine, nor any of the other vaccines in advanced clinical trials, can give you COVID-19.

### *What do we know about the side effects of the first vaccines?*

Like all vaccines, the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine can cause side effects. These rarely interfere with daily activities, and often go away with over-the-counter pain medications. It is common to have these types of side effects after a vaccination. They mean your immune system is working and making antibodies as it's supposed to. The following side effects to the Pfizer vaccine are very common, meaning that they may affect more than 1 in 10 people:

- Pain at injection site
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Joint pain
- Fever

If you experience any side effects not listed here, tell your health care professional. Moderna has also released data that suggest their vaccine is safe. We're still waiting for complete data from their phase 3 clinical trials to know more about their side effects.

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## ***How many shots do I have to get if I want to be protected against COVID-19?***

Some of the vaccines that are being developed—including the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines—require two doses three to four weeks apart. It is very important that you get both doses at the recommended times. We do not yet know how long the protection from these vaccines will work. It is possible that you will need to get additional shots in the future.

## ***If I already had COVID-19, should I get vaccinated?***

If you have had COVID-19 and recovered, it is still worthwhile to get a COVID-19 vaccine. While most people are protected from getting COVID-19 again after they've recovered, we don't know how long that protection lasts.

## ***If I get vaccinated, can I stop wearing masks and socially distancing?***

If you get a vaccine, you should still protect yourself by wearing a mask and social distancing. We don't know how effective the vaccine is going to be. It's possible, for example, that the vaccine will protect you from getting very sick with the virus, but it will not prevent you from spreading the virus to other people. Until we have a better idea of that and know how many people are going to receive it, you should still practice social distancing, wear a face mask, and wash your hands often and well. We're going to have to do all of this for a little while longer until we know more and until the pandemic is more under control.

## ***How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?***

Vaccines expose us to pieces of either a bacteria or a virus. Our body mounts an immune response by making antibodies against those pieces. Antibodies are proteins that fight germs like viruses and bacteria by latching onto and disabling them. The goal is that our body will then recognize those pieces and use the antibodies to fight off any future exposure to the real bacteria or virus. There are several different types of vaccines. Traditional vaccines include pieces of the virus in them. This causes your immune system to react by making antibodies against those pieces. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are called "messenger RNA" vaccines. They do not contain pieces or proteins from the virus. Instead, they contain instructions for your cells, called "messenger RNA." This messenger RNA tells your cells to make the COVID-19 spike protein themselves. Once your cells make the spike protein, your immune system will make the antibodies that fight COVID-19 and protect you from getting sick from this virus.