

COVID-19 Vaccine Planning

Visit the [COVID-19 Resource Room](#) to submit your vaccine questions.

3. Can I get COVID-19 after I receive the vaccine?

No vaccine is 100% effective at preventing infection. An effective vaccine will lower your risk of getting the infection and will also lower your risk of severe disease if you are infected. A goal of a COVID-19 vaccine is also to make it less likely that COVID-19 can spread to others. Once clinical trials are complete and the results are reviewed, FDA and CDC will be able to share more specific details about whether and to what extent each COVID-19 vaccine will lower the risk of severe infection or of infection transmission.

4. If I get vaccinated, can I stop wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) ?

No. Even if you receive a COVID-19 vaccine you will still need to wear appropriate PPE to perform your duties as required by VA policy.

COVID-19 Vaccine Planning Process

5. When will VHA's COVID-19 Vaccination Plan be finalized?

VHA submitted a plan to the CDC in October. However, the plan will not be finalized until after a vaccine is both authorized or approved by FDA, **and** CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) issues recommendations for use in specific populations.

You can find more information about planning efforts at [VA's COVID-19 Vaccine SharePoint Site](#).

Vaccine Approval/Authorization Process

6. When will there be FDA-approved vaccines to protect against COVID-19?

At this time there is no FDA-authorized or approved vaccine to protect against COVID-19. FDA is working with vaccine developers, researchers, and manufacturers to expedite the development and availability of vaccines to protect against COVID-19. VA expects the FDA may authorize one or more COVID-19 vaccines for use in late 2020 or early 2021.

7. What efforts are being taken to produce a COVID-19 vaccine ?

The U.S. Government developed a multi-agency partnership named Operation Warp Speed (OWS) that works with other federal and private-sector organizations, such

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as universities and pharmaceutical companies, to develop, test, manufacture, and deliver hundreds of millions of doses of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines.

For more information on OWS, view the [Department of Health and Human Services OWS Fact Sheet](#).

8. What is the FDA's role in approving a safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19? The FDA regulates vaccines. Vaccines undergo a rigorous review of laboratory and clinical data to ensure the safety and effectiveness of these products before they are made available to the public.

During a public health emergency – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – the FDA can issue an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) to provide more timely access to critical medical products such as vaccines. The process for authorizing use of the vaccine(s) includes the same steps taken in when considering formal approval and licensing, only with a condensed timeline that limits the length of follow up required to evaluate safety and effectiveness. However, the FDA will continue monitoring the vaccine's safety and effectiveness even after it has been authorized to look for any adverse reactions or side effects.

To view the details of the condensed timeline, view the [Operation Warp Speed Accelerated COVID-19 Vaccine Process infographic](#). To learn more about the Emergency Use Authorization process, visit the [FDA video](#).

Risk Stratification

9. What criteria will VA use to distribute the vaccine while supplies are limited? VA is working with CDC and other federal partners to develop a phased plan to maximize the benefit of any approved COVID-19 vaccine. Under this phased plan, immunizations for high-risk Veterans and staff will be based on CDC guidelines which includes the following criteria:
 - x Risk of acquiring infection
 - x Risk of severe illness and death
 - x Risk of transmitting disease
 - x Risk of harm to society if essential workers, including health care personnel, are unable to work

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Based on these criteria, the vaccine will first be offered to health care personnel at high-risk of infection from COVID-19, as they are essential for care of Veteran patients throughout the pandemic. Vaccinating health care personnel has several benefits, including:

- x Decreasing transmission to patients who may be at high risk for severe disease if infected
- x Decreasing transmission to other employees
- x Promotes and maintains a healthier, stronger workforce to care for Veterans

VA will consider the following criteria in risk stratification of Veteran patients to determine who will be offered vaccine when it is in limited supply:

- x age
- x high-risk medical conditions
- x race
- x ethnicity

We know that certain demographic groups, such as Blacks, Hispanics, and Indigenous Peoples, have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and that other groups (pregnant women, those aged 65+, and people with certain health conditions) are at greater risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19 infection.. Visit this [CDC webpage](#) for a list of conditions that increase the risk of severe illness. VA is taking these populations into consideration in our vaccine planning efforts.

10. I am an employee with a high-risk condition. Why can't I receive the COVID-19 vaccine in the earliest phase?

Initial vaccination will focus on employees who are at highest risk of acquiring infection and at highest risk of transmitting disease based on their job-specific roles and exposures. However, VHA expects to receive, over the next several months, enough supply to vaccinate you if you choose to be vaccinated. VHA is making every effort to save lives by identifying the highest risk groups to receive vaccine first.

11. Will I be able to get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as one is available?

Initially there will be limited quantities of COVID-19 vaccine available. VHA currently plans to offer the vaccine first to health care personnel, followed by high-risk Veterans, using [criteria](#) developed from CDC guidelines. Vaccinating high-risk health

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care personnel first promotes a strong and healthier workforce to continue caring for Veterans. VA's goal is to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to all employees and Veterans who want it when supplies become available. Eventually, we expect to receive enough supply to vaccinate all who choose to be vaccinated.

12. If there are multiple COVID -19 vaccines authorized by FDA, will I have the option to choose which one I receive?

Yes, but some vaccines may be authorized before others, and some vaccines will be authorized for only certain subgroups of individuals. Also, initially, only limited supplies will be available. So, you may be offered a vaccine available based on whether you meet the risk criteria VA is using to maximize the benefits of vaccine across the entire population of Veterans and employees. As increased vaccine becomes available, VA's goal is to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to all employees and Veterans who choose to be vaccinated.

13. Who is considered to be high-risk for COVID -19?

Many individuals with chronic medical conditions – such as hypertension, obesity, diabetes or ischemic heart disease – are more likely to become severely ill or die from COVID-19. Visit this [CDC webpage](#) for a list of conditions that increase risk of severe illness. Others are more likely to become infected with COVID-19 because of where they live or work or because of the type of work they do (e.g., first responders, food service workers, health care personnel).

14. If I am a racial or ethnic minority, am I at greater risk for COVID -19 infection ?

Certain racial and ethnic minorities are at higher risk of being infected with or dying from COVID-19. Racial and ethnic minorities make up 40% of the population but account for approximately 50% of the COVID-19 deaths. VA is taking these populations into consideration in our vaccine planning efforts.

VA strives to ensure that all Veterans receive high-quality COVID-19 care when they need it. And the good news is that the survival rates for Veterans treated for COVID-19 at VA health facilities do not differ by race or ethnicity.

Getting Vaccinated

15. How many doses of a COVID -19 vaccine will I need to take ? Will I need a booster dose?

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The number of doses of a COVID-19 vaccine will vary by specific vaccine. The first two COVID-19 vaccines that FDA and CDC are expected to review require two doses given 21-28 days apart.

More information will be required to determine if and when additional COVID-19 vaccination may be needed to maintain protection from COVID-19.

Please visit the [CDC COVID-19 Vaccine](#) website for more information.

16. How long will my COVID-19 vaccine immunity last after vaccination ?
We won't know how long immunity lasts until we have an authorized vaccine and more data on how well it works.

Please visit the [CDC COVID-19 Vaccine](#) website for more information.

17. Can I receive the COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the same time? And if not, what length of time is required between vaccines?
VA expects the CDC to recommend against administering both flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time. CDC will provide this guidance once a vaccine is authorized or approved and clinical trial results are available for review.

If CDC recommends administering both vaccines separately, we will follow their guidance on the length of time needed between administering the two vaccines.

Please visit the [CDC COVID-19 Vaccine](#) website for more information.

Supplies and Equipment

18. What Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be required if I will be handling and administering the vaccine?
As different vaccines have different handling requirements, VA will learn the PPE requirements for each vaccine as they are authorized.

Policy

19. As an employee, will I be required to receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

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At this time, there is no mandate for employees to get the COVID-19 vaccination. VA will offer VHA personnel the vaccine. Many health care professionals are at risk for COVID-19 and can pass the infection on to others, including patients who may be at high risk for severe COVID-19 disease or death. For this reason, VA will encourage VHA health care personnel to get vaccinated to protect themselves and the Veterans they serve.

Safety

20. Will VA monitor COVID-19 vaccination reactions?

Yes. VA clinicians will be closely monitoring for reactions, or adverse events. An adverse event is an injury or harm to an individual after receiving the vaccine, which may or may not have been caused by the vaccine.

VA will provide additional information to VA medical centers when the vaccine(s) is available. Information will include recommendations from the clinical trials about expected or observed adverse events. To accurately evaluate the vaccine's safety, it will be critical for VA, CDC, and FDA to adequately document and report these adverse events.

Education

21. Where can I get approved government COVID-19 vaccine information to share with Veterans and other VA employees?

The [FDA](#) and [CDC](#) currently have general vaccine information available on their websites. When specific vaccines are authorized or approved for use, additional educational materials will be available for distribution to vaccine recipients. You can find information from both these organizations, as well as other key COVID-19 vaccine information, at [VA's COVID-19 Vaccine Sharepoint Site](#).

Vaccine Tracking

22. Once VA medical centers begin to receive the vaccine, what will VA do to track and monitor COVID-19 vaccine?

VA is in the process of developing safe and secure information technology systems to track and report COVID-19 vaccine supply, distribution, and vaccination rates for

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all Veterans and staff. This also includes adapting systems to transfer data to CDC and internal VHA stakeholders to ensure that all required data is being shared.

23. What COVID-19 vaccine data is VA sharing with CDC?

Because initial quantities will be limited, CDC is requiring that all organizations that receive the vaccine, including VA, share vaccine administration, supply, inventory, and waste data on a daily basis. This will help to develop strategies to maximize distribution.

Clinical Trials

24. Is VA participating in clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines? If so, can I participate?

Yes. More than 50 VA Medical Centers across the country are recruiting volunteers to participate in a trial to study the effectiveness of a COVID-19 vaccine, including Phase 3 clinical trials for vaccines developed by Moderna, AstraZeneca and, most recently, Janssen. Anyone age 18 or older can volunteer to enroll in COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials. You do not need to be a Veteran to volunteer, nor do you need to be enrolled in VA health care.

Due to the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on minority populations, Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous people are especially encouraged to volunteer to ensure the vaccine is effective for communities that need it most urgently.

In addition, plain language Veteran-facing COVID-19 vaccine information can be found on [VA's COVID-19 registry and on the Veteran COVID-19 frequently asked questions page](#).