



Hot Topics/Questions:

The COVID-19 vaccine is an effective way to protect you, your loved ones, as well as our patients and co-workers against the virus. It's also our best hope to help our communities, schools and economy emerge from the pandemic and allow us to move forward. Each one of us is important in this vaccination effort.

Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine when there are other ways to prevent COVID-19?

Stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools and resources available. Vaccines help your immune system build protections against germs before you are exposed to them (and possibly sickened by them). Other steps, like wearing a mask, hand hygiene and social distancing, help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others. Together, getting the COVID-19 vaccine and following all of the other preventive strategies provides the best protection from COVID-19.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe?

Safety is a top priority during the vaccine approval process. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a rigorous regulatory review process led by physicians and scientists to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines. Over 38,000 individuals have been enrolled in the Pfizer Phase 3 vaccine trials and completed follow-up through several months after getting all required vaccine doses. A broad range of people took the vaccine safely in the clinical trials. Over time, as more people are vaccinated, even more information will become available about the benefits and risks of these vaccines. Questions about your personal health should be directed to your primary care provider and/or AHS Occupational Medicine Services (OMS).

How well do the COVID-19 vaccines work ("vaccine effectiveness")?

Data from mRNA vaccine trials show a reduced risk of having a severe case of COVID-19 after you get the 1st vaccine dose; in other words, about 50% or greater immunity to the virus. Starting seven days after you get the 2nd dose, the vaccine is about 95% effective in preventing COVID-19 infection. We are very excited about this incredible scientific advancement.

What are possible side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

A side effect is any health problem shown by studies to be caused by a vaccine. Like any medication, vaccines can cause side effects. Less than 0.6% of people who were given the vaccine and 0.51% of people who were given the placebo reported allergic reactions, some of which were mild in the trials, according to the first Food and Drug Administration (FDA) review of the vaccine data. In other words, there was no difference between the vaccine and placebo group regarding allergic reactions in the clinical trials. Usually, vaccine side effects are minor (like a sore arm where the shot was given or a low-grade fever after getting a vaccine), and they go away on their own within a few days.

Will everyone in my department get the shot at the same time?

Our goal is to get as many team members/physicians vaccinated as soon as possible to ensure their safety. Because the vaccine can potentially cause temporary side effects such as fever and muscle aches that may require a day of rest, it is advisable that members of a department stagger their scheduled vaccines. As per CDC recommendation, approximately 1/3rd of a department will be vaccinated at the same time selected randomly to ensure equality.

Can my family get the shot at AHS?

At the present time, vaccine availability is limited, and only AHS team members, including AHS physicians, will be vaccinated in the first rounds of vaccination. Plans are in development for patient/community vaccination in the coming weeks, when additional supplies and guidance are available.



If I already had COVID-19 and have recovered, do I still need to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

There is not enough information currently available to fully tell whether someone is protected (called natural immunity) from getting COVID-19 a 2nd time. Early data suggest that natural immunity to COVID-19 may not last very long, but more studies are needed. It is recommended that those individuals should be vaccinated. The vaccine will likely boost one's immunity and will not harm you if you have already had COVID-19. If you have COVID-19 in the past 90 days, including a positive test, you may elect to wait to get vaccine until later in the vaccine program allowing others, who have not already had COVID-19 to get the vaccine first.

COVID-19 Vaccine General Information

How does the COVID-19 vaccine work?

AHS will receive the Pfizer vaccine, which is a “messenger RNA vaccine” (mRNA vaccine) injected into the deltoid (upper arm/shoulder) muscle with a needle. mRNA is most easily described as “instructions for cells” on how to make a piece of the “spike protein” that is unique to the COVID-19 virus. When you get the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine, an immune response against the COVID-19 “spike protein” is triggered. This immune response helps our bodies build immunity to the virus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19 disease. The “spike protein” is only one piece of the virus; by itself, the “spike protein” cannot cause COVID-19 infection or spread COVID-19 to anyone else.

How many shots of the COVID-19 vaccine will I need to get?

AHS will be giving the Pfizer vaccine that requires 2 shots given 21 days apart (range: 19 – 23 days). You must get 2 doses of the **same** vaccine from the same manufacturer (that is, you cannot get 1 Pfizer and 1 Moderna shot).

Will the COVID-19 vaccine cause me to test positive for COVID-19?

The COVID-19 vaccine will not cause you to have a positive PCR (molecular) or antigen test, the tests that are used to determine if you are currently infected with COVID-19. In some people, it is possible that getting the vaccine will cause the body to make enough COVID-19 antibodies to be detectable on antibody blood tests, the tests we have been using to know if you have been exposed to COVID-19 in the past. Even after getting the vaccine, if you have signs and symptoms of COVID-19, exposure to COVID-19, or other indication for being tested, you may still get a PCR or antigen test per usual.

How long does immunity from the vaccine last?

It is unknown at this time how long the immunity from the vaccine lasts as the first people to receive the vaccine only did so in July of this year. A longer period of study and follow up will be needed.

Will the virus mutate and change the vaccine next year?

This, too, is unknown as we have only been aware of this virus for the past year. Certain viruses, notably influenza, mutate readily in ways that make them insensitive to antibodies from previous infections or to previous vaccines. We do know that the SARS-CoV-2 can mutate, but so far, the mutations that have been observed effect how readily the virus can cause infection, and not how it will react to antibodies. Nevertheless, this virus, being so new to our experience, will require further study and follow up to determine if it can develop mutations affecting its ability to overcome the vaccine.

Is this an annual vaccine?

When a vaccine is licensed, we will only have information about the length of immunity from the vaccine clinical trials. For example, if the first people in the study were vaccinated in July 2020 and the vaccine is licensed in December 2020, we will only have information about the immune response up to 5 months after vaccination. The vaccine manufacturer will likely continue to monitor vaccine recipients for several months or more so that, over time, we will continue to get a



better picture of the durability of immunity. With this information, we will be better able to understand whether vaccines against COVID-19 will require annual dosing like influenza.

Will I need a booster, and how often?

A second shot will be required 21 days after the first shot, but whether further booster doses will be required in the months and years to come is not yet known.

Is there an incubation/quarantine period after receiving this vaccine?

No. The vaccine does not contain a live virus, so a person who receives the vaccine will not pose any danger to other individuals

What do I need to do between the first and second shots?

Please follow all best practices to stay healthy (following PPE and universal masking and eye protection protocols, cleaning hands frequently, disinfecting commonly used items and surfaces, social distancing, monitoring for signs and symptoms of COVID-19, etc.) and reporting illness and staying home when sick still apply even after vaccination. AHS will closely monitor vaccination progress and guidance from local, state, and national authorities and will communicate any changes made to our policies.

What do I do if I miss my second dose appointment?

The Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine series is 2 doses given 21 days apart. If you receive one dose of the vaccine, you should receive a second dose of this same vaccine 3 weeks later to complete the vaccination series. Should you miss the second dose appointment, **make a follow-up appointment immediately**. At this point in time, there is no recommendation that you will need to restart the series from the beginning if you miss the second dose.

Does the COVID-19 vaccine take the place of the pneumonia vaccine or the flu vaccine?

No, the COVID-19 vaccine does not take the place of the pneumonia vaccine or the flu vaccine. It is a good idea to be up to date on pneumonia and flu vaccines in addition to COVID-19. Please consult with your health care provider regarding which vaccines are recommended for you.

Will getting the flu vaccine protect me against coronavirus?

No. Influenza viruses and coronaviruses are different. Getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19; however, the vaccine can reduce flu illnesses, hospitalizations and can help to conserve potentially scarce healthcare resources during the pandemic. It's likely that flu viruses and the virus that causes COVID-19 will both be spreading this winter, making it more important than ever to get a flu vaccine. It is the best way to protect yourself and others – especially those who are particularly vulnerable to both COVID-19 and influenza, such as older adults and those with chronic health conditions.

Can I get the flu shot and the new COVID-19 vaccine on the same day?

Clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccines did not include testing the safety of getting the flu vaccine on the same day, so it is best to talk to your health care provider about how far apart they should be spaced.

Are there other vaccines I can get that will help fight COVID-19?

There are five other vaccines in development that are at or near receiving approval and release, including the Pfizer vaccine, which Atlantic Health will be administering. The Pfizer vaccine has been determined to be highly effective, and so far, no benefit or advantage in terms of increased protection has been determined if other vaccines are received either instead of or in addition to the Pfizer vaccine. Other (non-COVID) vaccines do not protect against COVID-19 but are recommended to protect against concurrent infection, most notably the flu.



Can I get COVID-19 or spread COVID-19 to others after getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccine has shown great efficacy to protect the vaccine recipient, but there may still be the possibility of transmitting the virus to others if you are exposed to the virus.

The COVID-19 vaccine is not 100% effective, so exposure to someone with a COVID-19 infection could still result in you getting sick with COVID-19 even after you are vaccinated. If you develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19, you must follow the usual protocol. Do not report to work and notify your supervisor and OMS immediately (OMS Exposure Hotline: 973-829-4313).

Should I get tested for COVID-19 before getting the vaccine?

Data from the vaccine trials showed that individuals who were asymptomatic but tested positive for COVID-19 were still able to be safely vaccinated. As such, no testing for COVID-19 is necessary prior to getting the vaccine (neither the antibody blood test nor the nasal or saliva PCR and antigen tests).

Are there any specific vaccination recommendations if I received convalescent plasma or monoclonal antibodies as part of my therapy for COVID-19?

If someone has had COVID-19 or been treated with any antibodies, there is no contraindication to the vaccine as long as the patient is not still ill. We are not sure how long natural infection will protect the patient, but it is suspected that protection will exist for at least 3 months, and with vaccine doses likely to be limited early on, we would recommend that previously infected patients wait at least 90 days after their illness before being vaccinated.

Are there different vaccines for over 50 years of age, similar to the flu?

No. There is no specific vaccine for the older population as there is for the flu. Although older people tend to respond less well to vaccines in general, the COVID-19 vaccine trials did indicate that there was an excellent protective response in older individuals.

Can children get the COVID-19 vaccine?

In early clinical trials for various COVID-19 vaccines, only non-pregnant adults (16 years or older) participated. However, clinical trials continue to expand those recruited to participate. The groups recommended to receive the vaccines could change in the future.

COVID-19 Vaccine Safety Information

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe?

Safety is a top priority during the vaccine approval process. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has a strong regulatory review process led by physicians and scientists to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines. Over 38,000 individuals have been enrolled in the Phase 3 Pfizer vaccine trials and completed follow-up through several months after getting all required vaccine doses. A broad range of people took the vaccine safely in the clinical trials. Over time, as more people are vaccinated, even more information will become available about the benefits and risks of these vaccines. Questions about your personal health should be directed to your primary care provider and/or AHS Occupational Medicine Services (OMS).

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Does the COVID-19 vaccine have preservative?

No. The Pfizer mRNA vaccine does not contain preservative.

What are the reasons I should not get the COVID-19 vaccine right now (called “contraindications”)?

The COVID-19 vaccines are still very new, and we do not know everything about them. While a broad range of people took the vaccine safely in the clinical trials, there may be groups of patients that have special risks, and there may be risks that have not yet been appreciated. Over time, as more people are vaccinated, even more information will become available about the benefits and risks of these vaccines. Questions about your personal health should be directed to your primary care provider and/or OMS.

Contraindications include: a known history of a severe allergic reaction (e.g., anaphylaxis) to any component of the Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine (see list below)

Pfizer Vaccine Components:

Each dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine also includes the following ingredients: lipids (0.43 mg (4-hydroxybutyl)azanediyl)bis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis(2-hexyldecanoate), 0.05 mg 2[(polyethylene glycol)-2000]- N,N-ditetradecylacetamide, 0.09 mg 1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine, and 0.2 mg cholesterol), 0.01 mg potassium chloride, 0.01 mg monobasic potassium phosphate, 0.36 mg sodium chloride, 0.07 mg dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate, and 6 mg sucrose. The diluent (0.9% Sodium Chloride Injection, USP) contributes an additional 2.16 mg sodium chloride per dose.

What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

Currently, there are not enough data available to make conclusions about the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine in pregnant and breastfeeding individuals. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists have recommended that vaccine not be withheld from pregnant or lactating women. There is no information on the safety of the vaccine in pregnancy, but it has been established that COVID-19 in the setting of pregnancy has a high rate of morbidity and mortality. Please discuss the vaccine with your healthcare provider.

What pre-existing conditions would prevent me from getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccines are not live virus vaccines, so there are no contraindications for underlying immune-suppressive conditions or treatments. Vaccination was not studied in pregnant women, but COVID-19 tends to be more severe in pregnancy. Those who are pregnant or likely to become pregnant in the near future should discuss the risks/benefits of vaccination with their physicians before being vaccinated.

Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine at AHS

Is the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory?

No, not at this time; getting the COVID-19 vaccine is optional. If you do not receive the vaccine now, you may change your mind and get it in the future when it is available.

Is there a cost to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

No. The COVID-19 vaccine will be free of charge.

Which COVID-19 vaccine will AHS receive?

AHS will initially receive the Pfizer vaccine.



When will a COVID-19 vaccine be available at AHS?

Our vaccine clinics will begin on Wednesday, 12/16. Clinics will open at each of our medical centers as vaccine shipments are delivered, and vaccinations will continue for the foreseeable future. Based on the current schedule for vaccine shipments, we anticipate being able to provide the first dose to any AHS team or medical staff member who wants the vaccine by mid-January.

Where do I get the vaccine?

The vaccine will be available to team members, including physicians, at all AHS medical centers. We encourage you to view [all](#) available appointments when prompted to schedule and choose a time and location convenient for you. You may find more availability at our Western Region locations.

Who will receive the COVID-19 vaccine at AHS?

AHS will vaccinate team members and physicians in a phased approach based on state and national guidelines. The ultimate goal is to offer the vaccine to all AHS team members/physicians, and we anticipate that any team or medical staff member who wants to be vaccinated will be able to receive their first dose of vaccine by the middle of January, maybe before. Plans are also in development for patient/ community vaccination in the coming weeks, when additional supplies and guidance are available.

Can my family get the shot at AHS?

At the present time, doses are limited, and only health care workers will be vaccinated in the first rounds of vaccination. Plans are in development for patient/ community vaccination in the coming weeks, when additional supplies and guidance are available.

How do I schedule my appointment for a shot?

A MyChart account is required to schedule your COVID-19 vaccine appointments. When your vaccination appointment is ready to schedule, you will receive an email alert to the email address you have connected to your MyChart account to log in to MyChart and schedule your two appointments to receive the 2-dose vaccine. Schedule your appointments immediately when prompted, as we need to distribute this scarce resource once we receive it quickly. Please allow 20-30 minutes for your appointment. If you do not have a MyChart account, creating one is an easy process that can be done from both [The Compass](#) (our Atlantic Health System intranet) and the [AHS website](#). Medical staff members who need to register for a MyChart account can use this simple form:

Will my manager give me time off to get the shot?

Yes, please work with your manager when scheduling your appointment so coverage may be provided. Please allow 20-30 minutes for your vaccination appointments. If possible, schedule your appointments for a day when you will have the following day off.

Will everyone in my department get the shot at the same time?

Our goal is to get as many team members/physicians vaccinated as soon as possible to ensure their safety. Because the vaccine can potentially cause temporary side effects such as fever and muscle aches that may require a day of rest, it is advisable that members of a department stagger their scheduled vaccines. As per CDC recommendation, approximately 1/3rd of a department will be vaccinated at the same time selected randomly to ensure equality.

Will team members who received the vaccine be identified by a visual dot similar to past AHS flu campaigns?

No, the COVID-19 vaccination is not mandatory at AHS, and we will not be asking team members and physicians to place a sticker on their ID badge. Per AHS policy Flu vaccination is required of all AHS team members, medical staff, students, volunteers, and contingent workers. All should have received their flu shot no later than November 13, 2020.



If you choose not to get the vaccine during the first go around, will there be other times scheduled in the future?

If you are concerned about the safety of the vaccine and want to wait until more people have been vaccinated and there is more experience with the vaccine, there should be an opportunity at a later date to receive the vaccine. The Pfizer trial involved over 38,000 people, and the efficacy was excellent (95%), and the side effects were generally mild to moderate. Delaying vaccination if you are in a high-risk group would risk the chance that you could be infected with COVID-19 while waiting to receive the vaccine. Additionally, AHS will be opening up our program to the community in a few weeks, and the availability of the vaccine exclusively to AHS team members and physicians may decrease.

After Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine

What should I do if I have side effects, do not feel well, or have other concerns after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine?

There are possible **side effects** (listed above) that you can get after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. By contrast, an **adverse event** is any health problem that happens after getting a vaccine (although it is not always easy to know if it was caused by the vaccine). While adverse events from vaccines are rare, it is very important to identify those that do occur quickly. If you experience an adverse reaction, more severe than mild side effects, please seek immediate medical attention and follow up with your primary care provider and/or OMS.

Do I need to follow the same safety precautions after I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes! Please follow best practices to stay healthy (PPE and universal masking and eye protection protocols, cleaning hands frequently, disinfecting commonly used items and surfaces, social distancing, monitoring for signs and symptoms of COVID-19, etc.) and reporting illness and staying home when sick still apply even after vaccination. Team members must continue to follow all AHS policies. AHS will closely monitor vaccination progress and guidance from local, state, and national authorities and will communicate any changes made to our policies.

Do I need to wear a mask after I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes! All best practices to stay healthy still apply even after vaccination. Team members and physicians must continue to follow all AHS universal masking and eye protection protocols. AHS will closely monitor vaccination progress and guidance from local, state, and national authorities and will communicate any changes made to our policies.

Can I start traveling after I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

No. Team members and physicians must continue to follow all AHS pandemic travel policies. AHS will closely monitor vaccination progress and guidance from local, state, and national authorities and will communicate any changes made to our policies.

Have additional questions about the COVID-19 vaccine?

Visit the COVID-19 Vaccine Program section on [COVID-19 Central on The Compass](#)

OMS Exposure Hotline: 973-829-4313