

COVID-19 VACCINE FAQ (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

Prisoners' Legal Services April 26, 2021

At the beginning of 2021, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved COVID-19 vaccines for use in the United States. A great many people have already received the vaccine, including President Biden and Vice President Harris, all nine U.S. Supreme Court Justices, former presidents Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Jessie Jackson, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Dalai Lama, Mavis Staples, Samuel L. Jackson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Stephanie Elam, Tyler Perry and Al Roker.¹ In April, many colleges and universities, including Cornell University, Syracuse University, and Ithaca College announced that they are requiring students to be vaccinated before returning to campus in the fall. Prisoners' Legal Services compiled this fact sheet so incarcerated New Yorkers will know as much as possible about the vaccine.

1. When will DOCCS offer the vaccine to the incarcerated population?

DOCCS is now offering the vaccine to all incarcerated individuals. The vaccine is being distributed on a hub by hub basis. How quickly the vaccines are distributed depends in part on how many doses of the vaccine the Department of Health **allocates** (gives) to DOCCS.

2. Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved three vaccines for emergency use. These vaccines were tested on tens of thousands of adults from diverse backgrounds, including older adults and communities of color. Clinical trial data showed that all three vaccines are safe and effective at preventing COVID-19. The FDA holds these vaccines to the same safety standards that it held all previously approved vaccines. The FDA continues to closely monitor the safety of the vaccines.

In April 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) briefly paused the use of the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) vaccine when we learned that out of the 7,000,000 people who had been given the J&J vaccine, 7 people had developed blood clots with low platelets. Blood clots with low platelets are a serious health risk.

The pause was lifted shortly after it was imposed because the risk of blood clots was so low.² However, the CDC warns that women younger than 50 “especially should be aware of the rare risk of blood clots with low platelets after vaccination” and that other vaccines are available where this risk has not been seen.

¹ The list of vaccinated people is heavily weighted toward older individuals as they are people to whom many states first offered doses of the vaccine

² New York Times, April 13, 2021, Updated April 15, 2021, “J&J Vaccine and Blood Clots: The Risks, if Any, Are Very Low,” [J&J Vaccine and Blood Clots: A Risk, if It Exists, Is Tiny - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/13/health/covid-19-johnson-johnson-vaccine-blood-clots.html)

People who take the J&J vaccine are twice as likely to be hit by lightning as they are to develop blood clots.³

3. Why should I get vaccinated?

First, so you won't get COVID-19, a virus that can have serious, life-threatening complications. Some people who have "recovered" from COVID-19 continue to have a variety of serious and sometimes permanent health issues.

Second, so that you don't get sick and spread the disease to friends, family, and others around you.

Third, data from clinical studies of tens of thousands of participants demonstrate that the known and potential benefits of the vaccine outweigh the known and potential harms of becoming infected with COVID-19.

4. How many approved vaccines are there?

There are currently three COVID-19 vaccines approved for emergency use by the FDA, the Pfizer-BioNTech (Pfizer) vaccine, the Moderna vaccine, and the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine. All three have been approved by New York State's Independent Clinical Advisory Task Force.

5. Are there risks and side effects of the vaccine?

You may experience side effects from the vaccine. The side effects mean your body is building protection. Common side effects are pain and swelling in the arm where you got the shot, fever, chills, headache, and tiredness. Side effects may feel like the flu and even affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. If the redness or other side effects do not seem to be going away after a few days, see a doctor.

A statistically insignificant number of people who got the J&J vaccine experienced blood clots. See 2 above.

There is no risk that getting the vaccine will infect you with COVID-19.

6. How is the vaccine administered?

COVID-19 vaccines are administered by intramuscular (IM) injection, that is, a shot in the arm. The Moderna vaccine requires two doses, administered 28 days apart. The Pfizer vaccine also requires two doses, administered 21 days apart. The J&J vaccine only requires one dose.

7. Will the vaccine prevent me from getting COVID-19?

A COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you from getting COVID-19. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have around 95% efficacy. The J&J vaccine has around 72% efficacy but has 85% efficacy with respect to severe disease, including people who were sick

³ ABC News, April 17, 2021, available at [Rare reactions to Johnson & Johnson vaccine remain a mystery, putting many women on edge - ABC News \(go.com\)](https://www.abcnews.com/news/2021/04/17/johnson-johnson-vaccine-rare-reactions/)

enough to require medical intervention but recovered without hospitalization. By way of comparison, the seasonal flu vaccine has an efficacy rate of 40-60%.

It does take time for your body to build protection after any vaccination so you may not be protected until a week or two after your second shot.

8. When I get vaccinated, can I stop physical distancing and wearing a face covering?
No. There is not yet enough information to say if or when it will be safe to stop physical distancing and wearing face coverings. While the vaccine protects you from getting COVID-19, you may be able to transmit the virus. Thus, after being vaccinated, you should continue to physically distance and wear a mask to protect others.

9. How long will immunity last after getting the vaccine?
Scientists have not determined the duration of immunity resulting from being vaccinated. Looking at studies on natural immunity from the coronavirus, experts hypothesize that protective immunity from the vaccines will last at least six to eight months.⁴

The Moderna vaccine gives immunity for at least 6 months.⁵ Pfizer reports that its vaccine also provides immunity for at least 6 months.⁶ As of the date of publication, (April 26, 2021), we were unable to find specific data on the duration of immunity conferred by the J&J vaccine.

It is possible that getting a COVID-19 vaccination will become an annual event like getting a flu shot.

10. Will the vaccine prevent me from passing COVID-19 to others?
This is still unclear. The vaccine, which is injected deep into the muscles to stimulate the immune system to produce antibodies, keeps the vaccinated person from developing symptoms and getting sick. It is unclear though if the antibodies will be able to neutralize the virus in the nose and throat which is where the virus enters. If it does not, the virus can still be sneezed, coughed, or breathed out. It will take more time to know the answer. **That is why even after receiving the vaccine, you should continue to wear masks and socially distance.**

11. Do I need to get vaccinated if I've already had COVID-19 and recovered?
Yes. While evidence suggests that reinfection with the virus is uncommon in the first 90 days after the initial infection, scientists have not determined that people who recover from COVID-19 are immune from getting the virus a second time. A small number of

⁴ National Center for Biotechnology Information, January 6, 2021, available at [Immunological memory to SARS-CoV-2 assessed for up to 8 months after infection \(nih.gov\)](#)

⁵ See New England Journal of Medicine, April 6, 2021, available at [Antibody Persistence through 6 Months after the Second Dose of mRNA-1273 Vaccine for Covid-19/NEJM](#)

⁶ CNN, April 1, 2021, available at [Ongoing trial shows Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine remains highly effective after six months - CNN](#)

people have been infected twice. Further, a recent study shows that the body stops producing antibodies to the virus roughly six months after a person has recovered.

Doctors recommend that **if you test positive for COVID-19 and you were treated with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma**, you wait 90 days before getting the vaccine.

12. What if I have allergies?

If you have a history of severe allergic reactions not related to vaccines or injectable medications, you may still get a COVID-19 vaccine. You should be monitored for 30 minutes after getting the vaccine.

If you've had a severe allergic reaction to other vaccines or injectable medications, ask your doctor if you should get a COVID-19 vaccine. If you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in a COVID-19 vaccine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends not getting that specific vaccine.

If you have a severe allergic reaction after getting the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, you should not get the second dose.

The vaccine does not contain eggs, preservatives, or latex.

13. Can a COVID-19 vaccine give you COVID-19 or cause a positive test?

No. The vaccines do not use a live virus.

14. Which vaccine will I get?

It depends on which vaccine the NYS DOH distributes to DOCCS. Other vaccines that are still in development may also become available following the completion of successful clinical trials and FDA approval.

COVID-19 VACCINE FACTS

Fact: The rapid development and testing of the COVID-19 vaccine did not reduce its safety or effectiveness.

Many pharmaceutical companies invested significant resources into quickly developing a vaccine for COVID-19 because of the world-wide impact of the pandemic. The emergency situation warranted an emergency response but that does not mean that companies bypassed safety protocols or didn't perform adequate testing. To receive emergency use authorization, the biopharmaceutical manufacturer must have followed at least half of the study participants for at least two months after completing the vaccination series, and the vaccine must be proven safe and effective in that population. In addition to the safety review by the FDA, the Advisory Committee on Immunization convened a panel of vaccine safety experts to independently evaluate the safety data from the clinical trial. Mayo Clinic vaccine experts also reviewed the available data. The safety of the COVID-19 vaccine will continue to be closely monitored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the FDA.

Fact: The mortality rate for COVID-19 is significantly higher than the mortality rate for the seasonal flu.

COVID-19's mortality rate is 1% to 2%. A 1% mortality rate is 10 times more lethal than the mortality rate for the seasonal flu. COVID-19 also appears to spread more easily than the flu and cause more serious symptoms and long-lasting health problems.

Fact: The COVID-19 vaccine does not involve the insertion of a microchip or nano-transducers in your brain

There is no vaccine “microchip” and the vaccine will not track people or gather personal information into a database. The idea that the vaccination involves microchips or nano-transducers started after Bill Gates from The Gates Foundation talked about creating digital certificate of vaccine records. The technology he was referencing did not involve a microchip, has not been implemented in any manner and is not tied to the development, testing or distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Fact: The COVID-19 vaccine will not alter your DNA

The Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines are messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines. According to the CDC, mRNA vaccines work by instructing cells in the body how to make a protein that triggers an immune response. Injecting mRNA into your body will not interact or do anything to the DNA of your cells.⁷ Human cells break down and get rid of the mRNA soon after they have finished using the instructions.

The J&J vaccine is an adenovirus vaccine. Adenovirus vaccines do not have the capacity to alter DNA.⁸

Fact: Relying on herd immunity rather than vaccines is not a realistic or safer method for controlling COVID-19.

In order to reach herd immunity, society would be shut down longer, millions more would die, and many more would suffer. People need to get vaccinated to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), The New York Times, The Mayo Clinic, Ny.gov, University of California-Davis, University of California San Francisco, Vox, NYS DOCCS, ABC news, National Society for Biotechnology Information, New England Journal of Medicine, CNN and MedPage Today

⁷ MedPage Today, March, 12, 2021, available at [Here's Why Viral Vector Vaccines Don't Alter DNA | MedPage Today](#)

⁸ Id.