QUESTIONS & ANSWERS: COVID-19 VACCINES

The following provides people living with cystic fibrosis and their families with the latest information and resources on COVID-19 vaccines. This information will be updated as the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation monitors developments to understand how these vaccinations may impact the CF community.

This is NOT medical advice. Care decisions should be based on recommendations — and the associated benefit-risk assessment of treatment options — from your CF care team and the goals and circumstances of the patients and families they serve.

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BEFORE GETTING VACCINATED

What vaccines have been approved for COVID-19?

Two vaccines have received U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorization. The first, from Pfizer, was authorized on Dec. 11, 2020. The second, from Moderna, was authorized on Dec. 18. Submissions for additional vaccines are anticipated in early 2021. Learn more about how a vaccine is evaluated for use by the FDA here.

Can I choose which vaccine to get?

Because supplies of authorized vaccines are limited, you will likely only have one option when a vaccine becomes available. That option, along with all other vaccines, must meet the same, strict criteria for safety and efficacy before it can be authorized by the FDA and offered to the public.

When can I get vaccinated?

Because the supply of authorized vaccines is limited, they are being distributed in phases. The ACIP recommendations prioritize access to COVID-19 vaccines for people with high-risk medical conditions before the general public and recommend health care providers use clinical judgement in identifying patients whose individual risk factors warrant priority vaccine access. These recommendations support prioritized vaccine access for people with CF.

People with CF (ages 16 and older), should consult their doctor to determine if they meet the criteria for this high-risk group as defined by their state authorities. Vaccine distribution is determined by the CDC as well as state and local authorities. Learn more about the CDC’s prioritization process here.

How will I know if a vaccine is safe and effective for me?

To help you decide whether to get vaccinated, you can discuss the known benefits and risks with your doctor or care team. They can review the findings from clinical trials, including the potential side effects, and discuss your personal circumstances, such as your employment, school, or household situation.

Data from clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines being evaluated by the FDA indicate very high efficacy against symptomatic disease and were consistent across groups including those at high risk. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were shown in these trials to have over 90% efficacy in preventing COVID-19 infection. The trials were ethnically diverse, including about 10% Black and 28% Hispanic participants, and include data on people at high risk for severe illness, such as those with chronic but stable medical conditions, like high blood pressure, pulmonary disease, and diabetes. Based on these findings, there is no evidence to suggest that people with CF would respond differently from those included in the clinical trials.

Following the FDA authorization of a vaccine, the safety and efficacy are reviewed by an independent CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). This committee includes vaccine experts who use a rigorous method designed to protect the health and safety of the public. Learn more about this process here.

I have CF. Can family members in my household also get vaccinated to keep me safe?

The limited supply of vaccines will be reserved for people who are at greatest risk for severe COVID-19 illness. If members of your household meet the criteria due to their job, age, or health condition, they may receive priority access for the vaccine. Others will need to wait until more doses are available.
Until I get vaccinated, how can I stay safe?

There are many things you can do to protect your health and that of your household until a vaccine is available and, more importantly, until infection rates are reduced. Everyone — even those who have been vaccinated — should continue doing what they can to protect their health and the health of everyone around them. Learn more about prevention and safety here.

How much will a vaccine cost?

Most people will be able to get a vaccine without paying out of pocket. However, in certain circumstances, you may be charged by your doctor or health care provider for giving you the shots (the cost of the vaccine itself is covered by the U.S. government). If you have questions about whether getting a COVID-19 vaccine is covered by your health insurance or about cost-sharing, call Compass at 844-COMPASS (844-266-7277).

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN GETTING VACCINATED

Do I need both shots to be vaccinated?

Currently, the authorized vaccine and those expected to be reviewed by the FDA, require two shots. Timing between the shots does vary and should be reviewed with your doctor. It is important that you receive both shots of the same vaccine to fully benefit from the protection that the vaccine provides.

What are the side effects?

Although side effects from the different vaccines may vary, those that have been commonly reported include pain where the shot is injected, fatigue, muscle aches, chills, and fever. These side effects usually go away within a few days and are a sign that your immune system is working. Talk to your doctor about what side effects you can expect after being vaccinated. Vaccine manufacturers and public health officials will continue to monitor side effects as the vaccines are given to the wider population. Severe allergic reactions to both vaccines are rare. However, if you have had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine or injection in the past, ask your doctor if you should get vaccinated and what you can expect, including when to contact your care team or seek medical attention should you experience a bad reaction.

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTERWARDS

How long will I be protected after I get both shots?

The long-term protection from the vaccines is currently unknown as more data are being collected. Vaccine recipients in these trials will continue to be monitored for several months to years following FDA approval. Over time, we will gain a better understanding of long-term immunity.

Do I still have to mask, wash my hands and physical distance after I get vaccinated?

Yes, until infection rates remain low, everyone — even those who have been vaccinated — should continue doing what they can to protect their health and the health of everyone around them. People who have been vaccinated can still have the virus that causes COVID-19 and infect others, even if they themselves are not ill. Enough of the population will need to be vaccinated in order for us to learn how well the vaccines provide long-term protection under real-life conditions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For people with CF and their Families:

CF and Coronavirus (COVID-19): A section on cff.org where all COVID-19-related resources — including additional questions and answers about vaccines and how to reduce risk of contracting COVID-19 in everyday life for people with CF and their families — can be found in one place.

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