QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:
COVID-19 VACCINES

The following provides people living with cystic fibrosis and their families 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 were submitted to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for authorization. The first, from Pfizer, was authorized on Dec. 11. 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?

Initially, there will be a limited supply of authorized vaccines. When a vaccine becomes available, you will likely have only one option. 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?

When authorized, the limited supply of vaccines will be distributed in phases. First in line will be people who are at greatest risk for exposure to the virus, including those working in health care settings or people living in congregate settings, like long-term care facilities. Next will be those considered frontline essential workers and people age 75 and older. This group will be followed by people age 65 and older and those with certain medical conditions that put them at high risk of developing severe COVID-19 illness.

People with CF (age 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 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (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 evaluated by the FDA indicate very high efficacy against symptomatic illness 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 symptomatic COVID-19 infection 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 on cff.org under “What is the review and approval process for vaccines in the United States?”
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 exposure to the virus as well as those at greatest risk of 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.

How much will a vaccine cost?

Most people will be able to get a vaccine without paying out of pocket, including those who do not have health insurance. 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 vaccines authorized by the FDA require two shots. Timing between the shots varies 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 commonly reported in clinical trials 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 you can expect, when to seek medical attention if you experience a bad reaction, and if you have had an allergic reaction to vaccinations or injectable therapy in the past. Learn more about precautions associated with severe allergic reactions here.

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 wear a mask, wash my hands, and keep physically distanced 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:

For all COVID-19-related resources, including additional questions and answers about vaccines and how to reduce risk in daily life, visit https://on.cff.org/COVID-19

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