

COVID-19 Vaccine: Frequently Asked Questions

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- 1. Which COVID-19 vaccine will be offered to employees?** Initially, Lifespan will be offering the Pfizer vaccine, which is a two-shot series given three weeks apart. Going forward, we will also be receiving an allocation of the Moderna vaccine, which is a two-shot series, given approximately four weeks apart.
- 2. Are people protected after they get the first shot?** The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require both doses to offer maximum protective effect.
- 3. Is the vaccine safe?** Vaccines go through three phases of clinical trials. Each phase tests for safety and effectiveness across an increasing number of volunteers, until the vaccine has been tested and monitored in thousands. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will only approve a vaccine if it is safe, effective, and if its benefits outweigh its risks. **The COVID-19 vaccines are being held to the same standards as all other vaccines to make sure they are safe.**
- 4. How does the Pfizer vaccine work?** The Pfizer vaccine consists of genetic material called mRNA encased in tiny particles that shuttle it into our cells. From there, it stimulates the immune system to make antibodies that protect against the virus. The Moderna vaccine works in the same way. These vaccines do not have any impact on our genes. The vaccine material breaks down in the body shortly after it is taken into our cells.
- 5. Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?** No. The vaccine does not contain live or dead versions of the virus, so it cannot give someone COVID-19.
- 6. Is it mandatory?** No. Neither Lifespan nor the R.I. Department of Health is currently mandating vaccination for employees, although we strongly encourage it.
- 7. Are there side effects?** Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines may cause a temporary low-grade fever and discomfort, particularly after the second dose, which should be treatable with over the counter medicines like acetaminophen or ibuprofen (Tylenol, Motrin, etc). ***This is a normal part of the anticipated immune response.***
- 8. How can I tell if side effects are from the vaccine or from actual COVID-19 infection?** Common side effects from the vaccine include soreness, redness and swelling at the injection site; additionally, some people develop fever, muscle aches and headaches. Symptoms typically go away on their own within a couple of days. These side effects are a sign that the immune system is working.

The vaccine does **not** cause respiratory symptoms or a loss of taste or smell, which are sometimes seen with a true COVID-19 infection. Presence of any of the following COVID-like symptoms—cough, shortness of breath, rhinorrhea, sore throat, loss of taste or smell—are not typical after vaccination. If you have these symptoms, you should contact Employee Occupational and Health Services for evaluation.

9. Will I be able to work the day after I'm vaccinated? Since you may experience flu-like symptoms as your immune system reacts to the vaccine, employees are encouraged to schedule vaccination on the day before regularly scheduled time off, or on a Friday before the weekend. We will be staggering the sign-up procedure so that not all employees on a particular unit or shift would be vaccinated at the same time. **Please note:** not everyone will experience symptoms post vaccination. If you experience only mild effects, **you can continue to work** as long as you do not have a fever of 100 degrees or greater, or have increased or prolonged symptoms after two to three days. If you do have prolonged symptoms after two to three days, stay home and contact Employee Occupational and Health Services for evaluation.

10. Who will be offered the vaccine first at Lifespan? Our vaccine task force has created a [detailed prioritization list, based on employees' potential risk of being exposed to the virus at work, and CDC and DOH recommendations](#). All employees have been classified as higher, moderate or lower risk.

- Those providers and staff who have significant direct contact with infected patients or infected patient fluids or waste are at higher risk: warm units (ICU and non-ICU), emergency departments and more
- Those providers and staff who have moderate or transient direct contact with infected patients or infected patient fluids or waste are at moderate risk: non-warm units, outpatient providers who have moderate contact with COVID-19 patients, registration, admitting and more
- Non patient-facing employees are at lower risk: off-site employees in office settings, dietary, volunteers and more

We will follow state and federal guidelines in funneling the vaccine to those at highest risk, then broadening our reach in a phased approach until we have covered all employees who wish to be vaccinated.

11. What is the time frame for vaccinating Lifespan employees? We are scheduling clinics at all Lifespan hospital affiliates starting Tuesday, 12/15, on a routine basis throughout the

month of December, into 2021. We will continue offering clinics to employees in order of priority as we receive additional allocations of vaccine from the state of Rhode Island. **We hope to vaccinate all Lifespan employees over a period of three months or so, depending on the supply of vaccine we receive.**

- 12. How will I know if I'm considered higher, moderate or lower risk?** Your manager or department head/chief will be contacted and will alert all employees on the team of your prioritization status. You can also [read the prioritization recommendations here](#) (posted on the COVID-19 intranet site in the vaccine section).
- 13. If I have underlying health conditions that put me at higher risk, will I be offered the vaccine sooner?** Our prioritization list is based on the risk of exposure to the virus at work. We are leaving it to managers and physician leaders to identify those members of their teams at highest risk. If you have a concern about which category you are in—higher, moderate or low risk—because of health or other concerns, you should speak to your manager or department head.
- 14. Will physicians employed by foundations affiliated with Lifespan—for example, Brown Medicine—be offered the vaccine?** Yes. All Lifespan-affiliated physicians will be offered the vaccine, in order of priority, with those in the higher risk category going first.
- 15. How do I sign up to be vaccinated?** Your manager or department head/chief for physicians will be sent a sign-up link to share via your Lifespan email—once you receive the link, you should follow the prompts and make an appointment online.
- 16. How long will the appointments take?** Safety protocols require a 15-minute observation period after the vaccine is administered, so plan on 30 minutes per appointment.
- 17. Can I stop wearing masks and taking other precautions once I'm vaccinated?** No. While the vaccine is extremely effective, a small percentage of those who receive it may not be fully protected, so we need to continue to wear masks and other PPE, social distance and use other precautions. Also, because not everyone will be vaccinated, it will take a while before COVID-19 is no longer circulating widely.
- 18. How long will the vaccine protect those that receive it?** Pfizer reports that its vaccine is 90 percent effective. While the studies haven't yet indicated how long that protection will last, the FDA predicts it to be effective for several months and possibly a year. Vaccine experts are continuing to study the virus and vaccine to learn more.
- 19. If I am pregnant or breastfeeding, should I be vaccinated?** The CDC guidance does not exclude pregnant and breastfeeding women from receiving the vaccine—pregnant and

breastfeeding women may opt to receive the vaccine, with additional counseling from their health care provider.

20. If I have a history of food or other allergies, should I be vaccinated? We will follow current CDC guidance in offering the vaccine to people with a history of food, pet, insect, environmental or oral medication allergies, and non-serious allergies to vaccines (e.g. no anaphylaxis). You will need to be monitored for 30 minutes instead of 15 minutes post vaccination.

At the current time, we will **not** be offering the vaccine to anyone with a history of severe allergic reaction (e.g. anaphylaxis) to other vaccines or to an injectable medication.

21. If I have had COVID-19 and am now recovered, should I still be vaccinated? Yes. We are encouraging vaccination regardless of previous COVID status. The extent to which antibodies that develop in response to SARS-CoV-2 infection are protective is still under study. Therefore, even those who previously had COVID-19 should receive the COVID-19 vaccine.