

ULSTER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

COVID-19 VACCINE - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Revised on 12.29.2020

Are the COVID-19 vaccines that are current available safe?

The current COVID-19 vaccines available from both Pfizer and Moderna have undergone scientifically rigorous and proven clinical trials involving diverse populations consisting of tens of thousands of volunteers. In all the trials, no serious side effects have been identified and both vaccines have met and exceeded 94% effectiveness. The Federal Drug Administration has granted emergency authorization for both vaccines and here in New York a COVID-19 Clinical Advisory Task Force has conducted an independent safety review.

If I have had allergic reactions to vaccines, can I still safely get a COVID-19 vaccination?

The latest advisory from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that people who have experienced severe reactions to prior vaccines or injectable drugs can still get the two approved vaccines for Covid-19, but should discuss the risks with their doctor and be monitored for 30 minutes afterward. If you have further concerns, do not hesitate to discuss them with your doctor.

I am pregnant or have underlying health conditions that have compromised my immune system. Is it safe to get a COVID vaccine and will it still be effective?

The COVID vaccine trials have excluded particularly high-risk or vulnerable populations such as pregnant women, and the immunocompromised however subsequent studies are already underway to determine whether the COVID vaccines are effective and appropriate for these groups. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says it “recommends that COVID-19 vaccines should not be withheld from pregnant individuals, however it does not say that pregnant women should get it. If you are pregnant or are in one of these groups, you should discuss this question further with your doctor. Also, by the time you become eligible, more definitive information may be available to help guide your decision.

Can children get the COVID-19 vaccines?

At this time, children under age 16 cannot get the vaccines. Ongoing research is taking place regarding the safety and efficacy of administering COVID vaccines to children under age 16.

Are the COVID-10 vaccines available now in New York?

As per the date at the top of this page, New York State has received 630,000 doses of vaccine, 140,000 New Yorkers have received at least one dose, and approximately 300,000 more doses are due next week. However, who can get vaccinated is being prioritized by their degree of risk. This is the current priority matrix:

- **Phase 1:** Healthcare workers (clinical and non-clinical) in-patient care settings. Long-term care facility workers who regularly interact with residents. Most at-risk long-term care facility patients. NYS has also expanded this list to include urgent care center employees, individuals administering COVID-19 vaccines, and residents of New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) facilities.
- **Phase 2:** First responders (Fire, police, national guard). Teachers/school staff (in-person instruction). Childcare providers. Public Health workers. Other essential frontline workers that regularly interact with the public (pharmacists, grocery store workers, transit employees, etc.) or maintain critical infrastructure. Other long-term care facility patients and those living in other congregate settings. Individuals in the general population deemed particularly high risk due to comorbidities and health conditions.
- **Phase 3:** Individuals over age 65 and individuals under age 65 with high-risk comorbidities and health conditions.
- **Phase 4:** All other essential workers.
- **Phase 5:** Healthy adults and children 16 years of age and older.

Is Ulster County compiling a waiting list of who can get the vaccination, by when?

At this time, no waiting list had been established other than to direct available vaccines to high risk and high priority populations, as determined by New York State Department of Health guidelines. Check this website regularly for further information: <https://forward.ny.gov/covid-19-vaccine-distribution>

Ulster County Department of Health will also be announcing when and where vaccinations for the general public, and public vaccination events, will become available.

If I've already had COVID-19 and recovered do I still need to get the COVID-19 vaccine when it's available?

Yes. CDC recommends that you get vaccinated even if you have already had COVID-19, because you can catch it more than once. While you may have some short-term antibody protection after recovering from COVID-19, we don't know how long this protection will last. Please check with your doctor for further information.

Do I need to avoid close contact with others and wear a mask after I've received 2 doses of the COVID vaccine?

Yes. While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it will be important for everyone to continue using all the tools available to us to help stop this pandemic, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often, and staying at least 6 feet away from others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following CDC's recommendations for how to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19.

What percentage of the population needs to be vaccinated in order to achieve 'herd immunity'?

Experts do not know what percentage of people would need to get vaccinated to achieve herd immunity to COVID-19. Herd immunity is a term used to describe when enough people have protection—either from previous infection or vaccination—that it is unlikely a virus or bacteria can spread and cause disease. As a result, everyone within the community is protected even if some people don't have any protection themselves. The percentage of people who need to have protection in order to achieve herd immunity varies by disease.

Are the COVID vaccines free?

Yes, the vaccines are, and will continue to be, available free of charge

Are the vaccines mandatory?

Currently, New York State is not requiring mandatory vaccinations.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO CONTINUE TO PRACTICE WEARING FACE COVERINGS, MAINTAINING SOCIAL DISTANCE, AVOIDING LARGE GATHERINGS AND FREQUENT HAND WASHING BEFORE AND AFTER RECEIVING A COVID VACCINE. THIS VIRUS WILL NOT DISAPPEAR OVERNIGHT AND WE NEED TO UTILIZE ALL OF THE TOOLS TO CONTINUE TO PROTECT EACH OTHER AND OUR COMMUNITY.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT ANY OF THE ABOVE INFORMATION PLEASE DISCUSS WITH YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE TAKING ACTION – AND CONTINUE TO CONSULT ON ANY AND ALL SUBSEQUENT CONCERNS.