



COVID-19 2023-24 Updated Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

On September 12, 2023 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced new guidelines recommending that everyone ages 6 months and older receive a new updated version of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccine. This FAQ is intended to answer common questions regarding the vaccine and these recommendations.

Is this new COVID-19 vaccine different than all the other ones?

The 2023 COVID-19 vaccine continues to be an mRNA vaccine that “teaches” the immune system how to recognize and fight the COVID-19 virus. There have been a lot of different versions (known as variants) of the COVID-19 virus, this latest vaccine is designed to protect against the most common types of COVID virus that are currently making people sick. Both Pfizer and Moderna have manufactured this updated vaccine, and they have both been shown to be equally effective.

Who should get the new COVID-19 vaccine?

Everyone ages 6 months or older should receive this new version of the COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of whether you were vaccinated in the past and regardless of how many booster doses you have received previously. It is especially important for those who are [high risk for severe COVID-19](#) (over the age of 65 or other chronic medical illnesses)

So this is just another booster shot?

Booster shots are typically doses of the same vaccine that are meant to strengthen your body’s immune response to a virus. This new COVID-19 vaccine is actually a completely new formula to help protect you against new versions of the virus. It’s more similar to the seasonal flu vaccines that are developed every year.

How many doses of the new vaccine should I get?

This part is easy. Whether you have been fully vaccinated and boosted in the past or you have never received a COVID-19 vaccine before, the recommendations are for everyone to receive just one dose of this new vaccine.

The only exception to this rule is for young children (<5 years old) who have never been vaccinated for COVID-19. They are eligible to receive 3 doses of the Pfizer updated vaccine or 2 doses of the Moderna updated vaccine. Details about this are available on the [CDC’s website](#).

I recently got the “old” bivalent COVID-19 vaccine, how long should I wait before getting this updated one?



EMPLOYEE HEALTH

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

While the older version of the COVID-19 vaccine, known as the bivalent COVID-19 vaccine, is no longer approved or available, if you did receive it before the CDC updated their recommendations in September 2023, you should wait at least 2 months from your last vaccine dose before getting the new one.

I just got sick from COVID-19, when can I get the new vaccine?

If you are sick or recently recovered from COVID-19, it is currently recommended that you wait at least 90 days from the day your symptoms began before getting the new COVID-19 vaccine. Having COVID-19 is one way that your immune system can learn how to protect you from a future infection, but it is still recommended to receive the vaccine after a 3 month waiting period, especially for those who are high risk.

I have gotten sick over 3 times with COVID in the past, and gotten the COVID-19 vaccine, do I really need another shot?

Again, this shot is designed to protect you against the current versions of the COVID-19 virus circulating in the community. These versions are different than the virus you may have gotten sick with last year, and your immune system may not recognize them.

Has this new vaccine been proven to be safe?

This updated vaccine uses the same principles as all the past mRNA vaccine over the last 3 years. Over 700 million doses of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in the United States, and close monitoring through multiple safety systems has shown that they are safe and effective.

Does this vaccine work?

Studies have shown that the new vaccine is effective. While you may still get COVID-19 this year, this vaccine prevents you from getting very sick or requiring hospitalization.

Isn't it better for your immune system to get COVID-19 instead of getting vaccinated?

From a health standpoint, it is much safer to be vaccinated than to risk unprotected infection from COVID-19. While today's latest variants of COVID-19 are less severe than the virus was originally, over 200,000 people have died from COVID since January 2022, and the risk of [Long COVID](#) is real and can lead to several chronic medical problems.

Where can I get the new COVID-19 vaccine?

The new vaccine will be available starting October 1, at the UAB injection Clinic, on the 2nd floor of The Kirklin Clinic, Monday through Friday 8am to 4:30 pm.

Can I get the flu shot at the time same as the new COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes! There are no downsides to getting both at the same time, and both are available on the 2nd floor of The Kirklin Clinic.

How much does the new COVID-19 vaccine cost?



EMPLOYEE HEALTH

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Under the Affordable Care Act, all insurance companies are required to cover vaccines that are recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), including the updated COVID-19 vaccines. Uninsured or underinsured adults can get their COVID-19 vaccine for free under the Bridge Access Program through the end of 2024 from participating providers and pharmacies. Uninsured or underinsured adults can go to [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find COVID-19 vaccines at no cost to them.

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/covid-vaccine-recommendations-9-12-2023.html>

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2023/what-to-know-about-the-updated-covid-19-vaccine-for-fall/winter-2023>