

# DHCS COVID-19 Vaccine Administration Beneficiary FAQs

## November 24, 2021

With the federal approval of COVID-19 vaccines, the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) will provide the vaccine at no cost to all Californians.

DHCS has been following [California's COVID-19 vaccination plan](#), which was approved by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). For further information on the state's vaccination planning efforts please visit <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>.

California is leveraging its existing immunization framework and emergency response infrastructure to coordinate efforts among state, local, and territorial authorities to administer the vaccine. Throughout this effort, DHCS will share appropriate information with you and our providers, health plan partners, counties, and other key stakeholders.

To address beneficiary inquiries regarding the COVID-19 vaccination in Medi-Cal, these Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) have been developed.

For further information on the state's vaccination planning efforts please visit <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>.

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**1. What individuals are covered to get the vaccine?**

- A. All Californians can receive the vaccine at no cost. All full-scope Medi-Cal beneficiaries are covered by Medi-Cal.

**2. Will individuals have to pay for the vaccine?**

- A. No. The vaccine is being purchased by the federal government and will be provided to individuals at no cost, regardless of existing health coverage or type of coverage.

**3. Where can individuals get the vaccine?**

- A. Pharmacies, retail clinics, providers (including those enrolled in managed care plans), and any other sites of care receiving and administering COVID-19 vaccinations.

Additional information can be found on the CDPH website:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/COVID-19Vaccine.aspx>

The “My Turn” website can be used to schedule appointments.

Additional information can be found at: <https://myturn.ca.gov/>

**4. When can individuals get the vaccine?**

- A. Currently, vaccines may be given to every Californian age 5 years or older.

For more information go to: <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/VaccineAllocationGuidelines.aspx>

The “My Turn” website tells Californians if they or their minors qualify to get the COVID vaccine and schedule appointments. Users can submit information about their age or their minors’ age and COVID-related factors and can sign up to be notified over text or email when it’s their turn to get vaccinated and then schedule appointments.

Additional information can be found here: <https://myturn.ca.gov/>

**5. Will individuals be able to get transportation to the get their vaccine if needed?**

- A. For Medi-Cal managed care plan members:

Yes. Members can call their managed care plan for assistance with booking a vaccine appointment and arranging transportation to that appointment. They are to assist in coordination of vaccine services and transportation as needed.

The My Turn request center will have a check box asking if the individual needs transportation to a vaccine appointment. If the individual checks this box, they will be notified that they will receive a call to schedule their vaccine appointment.

A customer service representative (representative) from the California COVID-19 Vaccination Services Information Line call center (call center) will contact the individual. If the individual needs transportation and has Medi-Cal, and is enrolled in a managed care plan, the call center representative will schedule their vaccine appointment and connect them to their managed care plan for transportation coordination

B. For Medi-Cal Fee-for-Service beneficiaries:

Yes. My Turn books the vaccine appointment (at least 5 business days after the call in order to provide time for transportation arrangement) and then provides the member with contact information to schedule their Medi-Cal Fee-for-Service transportation. For Non-Medical Transportation (persons who do not need assistance ambulating), Fee-for-Service beneficiaries (or the Call Center) can call any of the providers on the below list of approved Non-Medical Transportation providers, or send an email to [DHCSNMT@dhcs.ca.gov](mailto:DHCSNMT@dhcs.ca.gov).

Link to approved Non-Medical Transportation providers

<https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Documents/List-of-Approved-Nonmedical-Transportation-Providers.pdf>

For Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (non-ambulatory patients), beneficiaries normally work with their medical provider, who can prescribe Non-Emergency Medical Transportation and put them in touch with a transportation provider to coordinate their ride to and from their appointment. The San Diego DHCS Field Office can also assist by providing a list of Non-Emergency Medical Transportation providers by location. The San Diego Field Office may be reached at (858) 495-3666.

Additional information can be found here: <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Pages/Transportation.aspx>

## 6. Can homebound individuals get the vaccine?

A. For Medi-Cal managed care plan members:

Yes. After the managed care plan has connected with a member who requests the in-home vaccination, they are to refer the member to the MyTurn appointment system, and then instruct the member to book their appointment and check the appropriate box for in-home vaccination.

The My Turn request center will have a check box asking if the individual is homebound and is unable to leave their home due to limited mobility or fragile health and need a vaccine in their home. If the individual checks this box, the call center representative will provide the individual's Information to the Local Health Department. The Local Health Department will then arrange for a medical team to visit the individual at home to vaccinate the individual and any family members.

A customer service representative (representative) from the California COVID-19 Vaccination Services Information Line call center (call center) will contact the individual.

B. For Medi-Cal Fee-for-Service (FFS) beneficiaries:

Yes. The My Turn request center will have a check box asking if the individual needs transportation to a vaccine appointment, or is homebound and is unable to leave their home due to limited mobility or fragile health and need a vaccine in their home. If the individual checks this box, they will be notified that they will receive a call to schedule their vaccine appointment.

A customer service representative (representative) from the California COVID-19 Vaccination Services Information Line call center (call center) will contact the individual.

**7. Is the vaccine safe?**

- A. COVID-19 vaccines were tested in large clinical trials to make sure they meet safety standards. Many people were recruited to participate in these trials to see how the vaccines offer protection to people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as those with different medical conditions.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has reviewed the vaccines for their safety and effectiveness before granting Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for their use. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and its Advisory Committee for Immunizations (ACIP) has also reviewed the safety information of the approved vaccines.

In addition, California formed a [Scientific Safety Review Work Group](#) to independently review the safety and efficacy of the vaccines. Based on all these reviews, the vaccine is considered safe for use in Californians. Please refer to the [CDPH COVID 19 Questions and Answers](#) page for additional details.

FDA and CDC will continue to monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines to make sure even very rare side effects are identified. Health care providers are required to report certain adverse events following vaccination to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS).

On August 23, 2021, the FDA formally approved the biologics license application (BLA) for Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine, commercially known as Comirnaty. Comirnaty is currently approved for use in individuals 16 years of age and older.

CDC is also implementing a new smartphone-based tool called v-safe to check in on people's health after they receive a COVID-19 vaccine. When you receive your vaccine, you should also receive a v-safe information sheet telling you how to enroll in v-safe. If you enroll, you will receive regular text messages directing you to surveys where you can report any problems or adverse reactions you have after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

Additional information can be found here: <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>

**8. What does Emergency Use Authorization mean for a vaccine?**

- A. In certain types of emergencies, such as with the current public health emergency, the FDA can issue an emergency use authorization, or EUA, to provide more timely access to critical medical products that may help during the emergency when there are no adequate, approved, and available alternative options.

Under the EUA authority, the FDA evaluates requests for authorization very quickly using the evidence that is available, carefully balancing the risks and benefits of the product as we know them, in addition to evaluating other criteria. EUAs are in effect until the emergency declaration

ends but can be revised or revoked as needs change during the emergency, or as products meet the criteria to become approved, cleared, or licensed by the FDA.

Additional information can be found here: <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/> and [CDPH COVID-19: Information for Laboratories](#)

## **9. Have any COVID-19 vaccines receive FDA Approval?**

- A. As of August 23, 2021, the FDA has approved the commercial two-dose Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, Comirnaty, for use in people 16 years of age and older. FDA approval is still pending for other vaccines that have been granted EUAs. Additionally, an EUA for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine still exists for people 5 through 15 years of age, as well as the third dose for immunocompromised persons and the booster dose.

## **10. What does FDA Approval mean? Is a vaccine that is FDA approved safer than others that only have a EUA?**

- A. Vaccines that are FDA-approved are vaccines that have undergone extensive, well-documented, checks for quality, safety, and effectiveness. Data-driven tests and evaluations have been performed and assessed multiple times before the FDA approves a vaccine. An FDA-approval should make you feel more comfortable that the vaccine has been vetted through a rigorous process and is safe. Vaccines that have received EUAs, but not full FDA approval, are still being formally reviewed by the FDA. However, when an EUA is granted to a vaccine, it means the FDA feels very confident in the safety characterized by the data, tests, and effectiveness that have been submitted so far, but may still be evaluating other criteria and risks before granting full approval. The EUA means the FDA feels confident in the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines, and believes it is safer to get vaccinated rather than not and risk contracting COVID-19.

## **11. How will safety be tracked once a COVID-19 vaccine is made available to the public?**

- A. After a vaccine is approved for use via Emergency Use Authorization (EUA), scientists and health professionals will continue to carefully monitor its use. The [Vaccine Safety Datalink](#) in the United States, which monitors many immunizations in California, is designed to report a safety problem in near real time so the public can be informed quickly of possible risks. Health care providers are required to report certain adverse events following vaccination to the [Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System \(VAERS\)](#).

When you receive your vaccine, you will also receive an information sheet telling you how to enroll in a program called [v-safe](#) that allows you to report problems or adverse reactions you have after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine to the Centers For Disease Control (CDC). Additionally, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CDC will continue to carefully monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines to make sure that even very rare side effects are identified as early as possible. These are some of the ways that will help detect previously undetected issues related to the vaccines as early as possible.

## **12. Is the vaccine helpful? I heard getting COVID-19 gives you better and longer immunity than the protection a vaccine can give.**

- A. COVID-19 vaccines prevent you from getting sick from COVID-19. If you get COVID-19, you risk becoming very sick and giving it to loved ones who may get very sick. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine is a safer choice.

The ability of COVID-19 vaccines to protect us from spreading the virus to others is not yet known but is being studied carefully. More detailed questions should be directed to your health care provider.

Even after being vaccinated, people will still need to practice other precautions, like wearing a mask, social distancing, handwashing, and other hygiene measures, until public health officials say otherwise. CDPH issued guidance that aligns with CDC recommendations and provides information about higher risk settings where masks are required or recommended to prevent transmission.

Additional information can be found here:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/guidance-for-face-coverings.aspx>

Further information regarding safety, efficacy, and recommendations for the vaccine can be found at <https://www.vaccinateall58.com/> and <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Covid19Vaccines.aspx>.

### **13. Are there side effects associated with the vaccine?**

- A. Most people do not have serious problems after being vaccinated for COVID-19. Any minor symptoms usually go away on their own within a week. Providers will provide information and explain any potential side effects that can be expected with vaccination.

Additional information can be found here: <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>

### **14. Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?**

- A. No, the vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 because it does not contain infectious virus.

Additional information can be found here: <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>.

### **15. Will there be any long-term side effects?**

- A. COVID-19 vaccines are being tested in large clinical trials to assess their safety. However, it does take time, and more people will need to be vaccinated before we learn about very rare or long-term side effects. That is why safety monitoring will continue. The CDC has an independent group of experts that reviews all the safety data and provides regular safety updates. If a safety issue is detected, immediate action will be taken to determine if the issue is related to the COVID-19 vaccine and determine the best course of action.

### **16. How many shots will be needed? Do I need to get a booster shot?**

- A. The number of shots will vary depending on which vaccine you receive.
- Two [Pfizer-BioNTech](#) vaccine doses should be given 3 weeks (21 days) apart.

- A third dose should be given at least 4 weeks (28 days) after the second dose, for individuals who are immunocompromised.
- Individuals that *should* receive a booster:  
For individuals who received the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, the FDA has authorized, and the CDC recommends, that individuals age 50 and older, or those age 18 and older and that live in a long-term care setting, *should* receive a booster shot of any of the three FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines at least six months after completing their Pfizer-BioNTech primary vaccine series.
- Individuals that *may* receive a booster:  
Additionally, the FDA has authorized, and the CDC recommends, that individuals 18 and older who received the Pfizer-BioNTech primary vaccine *may* receive a booster shot of any of the three FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines at least six months after completing their Pfizer-BioNTech primary series.
- Two [Moderna](#) vaccine doses should be given 4 weeks (28 days) apart.
  - A third dose should be given at least 4 weeks (28 days) after the second dose, for individuals who are immunocompromised.
  - Individuals that *should* receive a booster:  
For individuals who received the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, the FDA has authorized, and the CDC recommends, that individuals age 50 and older, or those age 18 and older and that live in a long-term care setting, *should* receive a booster shot of any of the three FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines at least six months after completing their Moderna primary vaccine series:
  - Individuals that *may* receive a booster:  
Additionally, the FDA has authorized, and the CDC recommends that individuals 18 and older who received the Moderna primary vaccine *may* receive a booster shot of any of the three FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines at least six months after completing their Moderna primary series.
- Johnson & Johnson's Jansen ([J&J/Janssen](#)) COVID-19 vaccine currently requires only one dose.
  - The FDA has authorized, and the CDC recommends, that individuals age 18 and older who received the J&J/Janssen vaccine *should* receive a booster with any of the three FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines at least two months after their original J&J/Janssen vaccine.

People with weakened immune systems aged  $\geq 18$  years who completed the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine series and received an additional vaccine dose (i.e., a third dose) may receive a single COVID-19 booster dose (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or J&J/Janssen) at least 6 months after completing their third vaccine dose. In such situations, these individuals with weakened immune systems may receive a total of four COVID-19 vaccine doses.

If you receive a vaccine that requires two or more doses, you should **get your follow-up shot(s) as close to the recommended interval as possible**. However, your second dose may be given up to 6 weeks (42 days) after the first dose, if necessary. You should **not** get follow-up dose(s) earlier than the recommended interval.

If you are eligible to receive a booster shot, you may choose which vaccine you receive as a booster dose. Some people may have a preference for the vaccine type that they originally received, and others may prefer to get a different booster. CDC's recommendations allow for this type of "mix and match" dosing for booster shots.

The eligible population(s) and dosing interval for a "mix and match" booster dose are the same as those authorized for a booster dose of the vaccine used for primary vaccination.

- For example, Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine recipients falling into one of the authorized categories for boosters (see above) may receive a booster dose of Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine (half dose), Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine or J&J/Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine at least six months after completing their primary vaccination.
- In another example, J&J/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine recipients 18 years of age and older may receive a single booster dose of J&J/Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine, Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine (half dose) or Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine at least two months after receiving their Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine primary vaccination.

Your health care provider will advise you when you should return for the second shot or a booster shot, as it varies by type of vaccine, as shown above.

Additional information can be found here: <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/> and <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>

**17. If I have already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get vaccinated with the vaccine?**

- A. Yes. There is not enough information currently available to say if or for how long after infection someone is protected from getting COVID-19 again; this is called natural immunity. Early evidence suggests natural immunity from COVID-19 may not last very long, and more studies are ongoing. Available evidence from clinical studies shows that the vaccine is safe in persons who have had prior COVID-19 infection or who have tested positive for it.

Additional information can be found here: <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>

**18. Do I need to wear a mask and avoid close contact with others if I have received 2 or more doses of the vaccine?**

- A. While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it remains important for everyone to continue using all the tools available to help stop the spread of COVID-19, including covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often, staying at least 6 feet away from others and avoiding crowded places.

CDPH issued guidance that aligns with CDC recommendations and provides information about higher risk settings where masks are required or recommended to prevent transmission, regardless of vaccination status. These include public transit, indoors at educational facilities, healthcare, correctional, and communal settings (e.g. homeless and emergency shelters).

Additional information can be found here:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/guidance-for-face-coverings.aspx>

**19. I have heard about herd immunity. What is it?**

- A. [Herd immunity](#) is a term used to describe when enough people within a population have protection—either from previous infection or vaccination—that disease spread slows and eventually stops within that population. As a result, everyone within the community is protected even if some people don't have any protection themselves.

**20. What percentage of the population needs to get vaccinated to have herd immunity to COVID-19?**

- A. Experts do not know what percentage of people would need to get vaccinated to achieve herd immunity to COVID-19. The percentage of people who need to have protection in order to achieve herd immunity varies by disease. At this time during the pandemic, we cannot rely on herd immunity to protect us from getting COVID.

**21. What is the risk of children getting sick with COVID-19?**

- A. Children can be infected and get sick with COVID-19. Most children with COVID-19 have mild symptoms, or they may have no symptoms at all, which is known as being asymptomatic.

Fewer children have been sick with COVID-19 compared to adults. However, infants (children less than 1 year old) and children with certain underlying medical conditions might be at increased risk for COVID-19. For further information, please consult your child's health care provider.

**22. Can my child get a COVID-19 vaccine?**

- A. The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine has FDA approval for ages 16 years and above, and Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) approval for ages 5 through 15 years.

The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children 5 through 11 years of age is administered as a two-dose series, 3 weeks apart, but is a lower dose (10 micrograms) than that used for individuals 12 years of age and older (30 micrograms).

Additional information can be found here: <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/> and <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>

**23. Can I take the COVID vaccine and the flu vaccine (or another vaccine) at the same time?**

- A. Current CDC recommendations allow administration of the COVID vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine or other vaccines.

**24. How long does it take to be protected after vaccination?**

- A. Although protection from the vaccine is not immediate, the first shot starts building protection. For vaccines that currently require a two dose series, it will take one-to-two weeks following the

second dose to get the most protection the vaccine can offer. Protection can be reinforced if a third or booster dose is given, as appropriate.

**25. If I have previously tested positive for COVID-19, can I still get the vaccine?**

- A. People who have previously tested positive for or been sick with COVID-19 but have now recovered may still benefit from getting vaccinated.

People are advised to get a COVID-19 vaccine even if they have been sick with COVID-19 before.

Additional information can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/faq.html>

At this time, we do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Please consult your health care provider for additional guidance.

**26. Who can I contact for more information?**

- A. If you receive your care from a Medi-Cal health plan and have questions, please call your [managed care plan](#).

For clinical questions please contact your provider.

For all other questions please contact the Medi-Cal Member Help Line: (800) 541-5555; TTY (800) 430-7077), Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. You may also call the Medi-Nurse Advice Line: (877) 409-9052.

**27. Where do I find general California guidance on COVID-19?**

- A. There are two California websites that offer general guidance on COVID-19. These are the State of California Coronavirus Response website and the California Department of Public Health website. Check both websites frequently, as resources are regularly updated and added. Below are the web addresses of each.

- The California Coronavirus Response website is: [covid19.ca.gov](https://covid19.ca.gov).
- The California Department of Public Health website is: [cdph.ca.gov/COVID19](https://cdph.ca.gov/COVID19)
- The Centers for Disease Control website is: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/faq.html>

**28. What is the difference between a third dose and a booster dose?**

A third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine is administered for individuals with weakened immune systems at least 28 days after the second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines, to help protect these individuals who may not have had a strong enough response to the first two doses.

For more on why immunocompromised individuals may need to get a third dose, see the [“COVID-19 Vaccines for Moderately to Severely Immunocompromised People.”](#)

A booster dose, designed to help individuals maintain their immunity for longer, is administered at least 2 months after receiving the J&J/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine or at least 6 months after completing the initial series of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.

People with weakened immune systems aged  $\geq 18$  years who completed the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine series and received an additional vaccine dose (i.e., a third dose) may receive a single COVID-19 booster dose (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or J&J/Janssen) at least 6 months after completing their third vaccine dose. In such situations, these individuals with weakened immune systems may receive a total of four COVID-19 vaccine doses.

If you are eligible to receive a booster shot, you may choose which vaccine you receive as a booster dose. Some people may have a preference for the vaccine type that they originally received, and others may prefer to get a different booster. CDC's recommendations allow for this type of mix and match dosing for booster shots.

**Additional Resources:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/answering-questions.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>

[https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/downloads/COVID-19-Vaccination-Program-Interim\\_Playbook.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/downloads/COVID-19-Vaccination-Program-Interim_Playbook.pdf)

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html>

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/COVID-19Vaccine.aspx>

[https://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/COVID19\\_response.aspx](https://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/COVID19_response.aspx)

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/uninsured-patient-covid-services-poster.pdf>

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/uninsured-patient-covid-services-poster-spanish.pdf>

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Johnson--Johnson-COVID-19-Vaccine-Updates.aspx>