

# EXPLAINER: What to know about COVID-19 vaccination in the US

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The first shots of COVID-19 vaccine are being delivered, but it will likely be months before doses are widely available for everyone at U.S. drugstores and doctor's office.

Details are still being worked out, but officials expect widespread availability by the middle of next year. A second [coronavirus vaccine](#) is

being reviewed this week by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and others are in development.

Even with vaccination, you'll still need to take precautions, like wearing a mask and social distancing, [health officials](#) say. That's because there's still some unknowns, including how much it reduces spread or how long protection lasts.

## WHO'S GETTING THE SHOTS FIRST?

The limited doses of Pfizer's vaccine are going to the most vulnerable first—[health care workers](#) and nursing home residents. That means the shipments are going to sites selected in advance by state officials. Hospitals are doling out the shots to their employees. For nursing homes, the government is partnering with CVS and Walgreens, which will be giving the shots in the homes.

Some top U.S. government officials will also be vaccinated in the first wave, according to the National Security Council.

## WHO'S NEXT?

Health officials are still working through that question. Possibilities include anyone 65 and older, teachers, police and workers in other essential fields, such as food production, and those with [health conditions](#) that make them more susceptible to complications.

An expert panel that advises the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) on vaccines will meet this month and make its recommendations. As with the first wave of shipments, it will ultimately be up to [state officials](#) to ultimately decide who's next and work out the specifics. For example, Arkansas has planned to put poultry workers in its next group for vaccinations.

## WHEN IS IT MY TURN?

For the rest of Americans, it could be a few months. U.S. officials say they expect to be able to give 20 million people their first shots in December. But with more vaccines in the pipeline, the shots could be widely available by the middle of next year.

State and local health departments will get the word out on eligibility as supplies ramp up.

## WHERE WILL I GET A SHOT?

States are signing up pharmacies, health clinics and doctor's offices to give the shots. Health departments will also probably run mass vaccination clinics. CVS said people will be asked to schedule their shots online, through an app or by phone.

Once doses are widely available, people should be able to use an existing government website, [www.vaccinefinder.org](http://www.vaccinefinder.org), to find COVID-19 shots. The website is already used to find vaccines for the flu and other diseases.

## ARE THERE ANY RESTRICTIONS?

Pfizer's vaccine is for people 16 and older. Testing is just getting underway in children to determine if they can be given shots as well.

[The CDC panel](#) said pregnant women could get the shot, but said they might want to talk to their doctor first. The panel also suggests avoiding getting other vaccinations for two weeks before and after a COVID-19 shot.

## HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

It should be free. The government is paying for the vaccine itself. And you shouldn't be charged a copay or other fee to get it.

The cost for giving the shot will be covered by private and government insurance. If you don't have insurance, providers can tap a government fund to cover costs.

## WHEN WILL I GET MY SECOND SHOT?

It depends on the brand of vaccine. Pfizer's is three weeks later. You'll get a vaccination record card as a reminder. You might also get reminder texts, calls or letters in the mail, depending on the location.

Shots will be recorded in state and local vaccine registries that already keep track of other vaccinations. COVID-19 vaccines can't be mixed and matched, so if a second dose is needed, providers will be checking to make sure you get the right one.

The CDC said it can take one to two weeks after the second shot to be fully vaccinated.

Not all vaccines in development require two shots. Johnson & Johnson is testing a single-dose vaccine.

## WHAT ABOUT SIDE EFFECTS?

There could be temporary [side effects](#) right after the shot, including fever, fatigue, chills or soreness in the arm where you got the shot. Health officials will be watching for any serious side effects as more people get vaccinated, as well as for any potential longer-term issues.

People who have had severe allergic reactions to other vaccines or drugs should talk to their doctors first, the CDC panel said. Those who've had

any kind of severe allergic reaction in the past should be watched for 30 minutes after vaccination. Others should be watched for 15 minutes.

## WHAT IF I HAD COVID-19?

Vaccinations should be offered to people regardless of whether they've been infected with coronavirus, the CDC panel said. People who are currently infected and have symptoms should wait until they've recovered.

If you've been recently exposed to the virus, the panel recommends waiting until after the quarantine period of 14 days. It says getting vaccinated shortly after an exposure is unlikely to prevent you from getting infected.

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