

CDC backs new COVID booster shots

September 13 2023, by Robin Foster



Following an approval granted Monday by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Tuesday signed off on new COVID boosters for Americans.

"We have more tools than ever to prevent the worst outcomes from COVID-19," CDC Director [Dr. Mandy Cohen](#) said in an [agency news release](#) announcing the approval. "[The] CDC is now recommending updated COVID-19 vaccination for everyone 6 months and older to better protect you and your loved ones."

Hours earlier, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) had voted to support the boosters for all Americans aged 6 months and older.

The COVID shots from Pfizer and Moderna will join the flu shot and newly approved RSV shots as part of a three-pronged [public health](#) strategy to tame the spread of all three viruses this coming winter. The updated COVID vaccines are each fully approved for those 12 and older and are authorized under emergency use for individuals 6 months through 11 years of age.

"Vaccination remains critical to public health and continued protection against serious consequences of COVID-19, including hospitalization and death," [Dr. Peter Marks](#), director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, said Monday in an agency [news release](#). "The public can be assured that these updated vaccines have met the agency's rigorous scientific standards for safety, effectiveness and manufacturing quality. We very much encourage those who are eligible to consider getting vaccinated."

The American Medical Association (AMA) applauded the approvals.

"Given that COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths continue to impact the U.S. population and an increase in infections is expected this fall and winter, the updated COVID-19 vaccines increase the [immune response](#) against the currently circulating variants and are projected to prevent about 400,000 hospitalizations and 40,000 deaths

over the next 2 years," AMA Immediate Past Board Chair [Dr. Sandra Adamson Fryhofer](#) said in a [statement](#).

"This is the first respiratory virus season where we have vaccines against the biggest respiratory virus threats, including an updated COVID-19 [vaccine](#), an annual flu vaccine, RSV vaccines for [older adults](#), as well as a long-acting monoclonal antibody for infants that reduces the risk of both hospitalizations and health care visits for RSV," she added.

One infectious diseases expert said the approvals matter most to vulnerable Americans.

"Having an updated booster that more closely matches circulating strains is an important tool for high-risk individuals, who still remain at risk for severe disease, hospitalization and death," said [Dr. Amesh Adalja](#), a senior scholar with Johns Hopkins' Center for Health Security in Baltimore.

In its approval, the FDA recommended the following eligibilities for Americans:

- Those aged 5 and older, regardless of previous vaccination, can receive a single dose of an updated COVID vaccine at least two months since the last dose of any COVID vaccine.
- Individuals aged 6 months through 4 years who have been vaccinated against COVID can receive one or two doses of an updated COVID vaccine (depending on the previous COVID vaccine received).
- Unvaccinated individuals 6 months through 4 years can receive three doses of the updated Pfizer COVID vaccine or two doses of the updated Moderna COVID vaccine.

The boosters target the XBB.1.5 Omicron subvariant. That's no longer

the dominant variant circulating, but those that are spreading widely are closely related, and health experts say this booster will still offer some protection.

"This decision comes at a time when COVID-19 cases are once again climbing. Now, most people 6 months or older in the U.S. are eligible to receive this season's COVID-19 vaccine, even if they have never been vaccinated against COVID-19 before," [Albert Bourla](#), Pfizer Chairman and CEO, said in a company [news release](#).

"We expect this season's vaccine to be available in the coming days, pending recommendation from public health authorities, so people can ask their doctor about receiving their COVID-19 vaccine during the same appointment as their annual flu shot, saving time now and helping to prevent [severe disease](#) later when respiratory viruses are at their peak," Bourla added.

"As the primary circulating strain continues to evolve, updated vaccines will be critical to protecting the population this season," Moderna CEO [Stéphane Bancel](#) said in a company [news release](#). "We appreciate the FDA's timely review and encourage individuals who intend to get their [flu shot](#) to also get their updated COVID-19 vaccine at the same time."

Although protection against COVID-19 wanes over time, about 97% of adults have some immunity from past COVID infections, vaccinations or both. These updated shots are expected to boost that coverage.

They will, however, come at a price. For the first time, the federal government is not covering costs of the shots.

Most people with private and public health insurance should still be able to receive them for free. Those who are uninsured may be able to get them at community health centers.

Others may have to pay. The full price is expected to be \$110 to \$130 per dose, according to *NBC News*.

Whether someone can get their shots covered, and when they can get them, will depend on their insurance, [Jennifer Kates](#), director of the Global Health & HIV Policy Program at KFF, a nonprofit [health](#) policy organization, told *NBC News*.

The Biden administration has also announced a "bridge" program to offer uninsured people access to free boosters through 2024.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a new [risk assessment](#) of a currently circulating strain of COVID-19.

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Citation: CDC backs new COVID booster shots (2023, September 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-09-cdc-covid-booster-shots.html>

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