

# THE PATH FORWARD

## VACCINATION AGAINST COVID

### **FACT: Getting vaccinated can prevent severe illness from COVID-19.**

The individual impact of COVID-19 varies, from mild symptoms to severe illness and death. There is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you, even if you do not have underlying health conditions that put you at increased risk of severe complications. The Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson vaccines are a safe and effective way to protect yourself from COVID.

### **FACT: You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine.**

None of the authorized vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines contain mRNA which works with the body's natural defenses to safely develop an immune response to the disease. The Johnson and Johnson uses a harmless adenovirus (common virus that typically causes cold or flu-symptoms) that triggers an immune response. When vaccinated, you will not test positive on viral tests, which are used to see if you have a current infection.



### **FACT: The currently available vaccines have proven to be safe.**

Each of the authorized vaccines were studied in large trials of over 30,000 volunteers to make sure they meet safety and efficacy standards and protect adults of different ages, races and ethnicities. These clinical trials were conducted according to rigorous standards set forth by the FDA. Even though no safety issues arose, the CDC and FDA will continue to monitor the vaccines for serious side effects. Monitoring vaccine safety is critical to ensuring the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccines continue to outweigh the risks associated with contracting the virus.

## KEY QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

### **How were the vaccines developed so quickly and what is an Emergency Use Authorization (EAU)?**

An EAU is a process by which the FDA can provide access to medical products, including a vaccine, in response to a public health emergency. For an EAU to be issued for a vaccine, the FDA must determine that the known and potential benefits outweigh the known risks of the vaccine.

In evaluating the EAU requests for the COVID-19 vaccines, the FDA evaluated the relevant statutory criteria and the scientific evidence available. The clinical trials generated the data and information used by the FDA to determine safety and effectiveness. Manufacturing and controls to ensure the quality and consistency of the vaccine product are also considered as part of the EAU.

The approved COVID-19 vaccines were subjected to a 3-phase clinical trial conducted according to the rigorous standards set forth by the FDA involving tens of thousands of study participants. The vaccines could be developed quickly because the US government, international counterparts, nonprofit organizations, academia and pharmaceutical companies developed a coordinated strategy for prioritizing and speeding the development of the most promising vaccines. Improvements in technology supported these efforts. In addition, the federal government made investments in manufacturing which allowed for faster distribution of the vaccine. No scientific standards were sacrificed in the development of the approved COVID-19 vaccines.

## **Is vaccination right for everyone?**

The vaccine is appropriate, indeed essential, for nearly every adult. The exceptions are as follows:

- You should delay vaccination if you've been diagnosed with COVID within the past 14 days or have a fever or other illness. In addition, CDC recommends the COVID vaccine be separated from other vaccines, like the flu shot, by 14 days.
- The vaccination has not been studied on pregnant women and immunocompromised patients, so the CDC recommends those individuals consult their medical providers about vaccination.
- Individuals who have a history of severe allergic reactions should consult CDC guidance and their medical provider before vaccination, as there are rare reports of severe allergic reaction to the vaccine.

## **Do I still need the vaccine if I've already had COVID-19 and recovered?**

Yes, the CDC recommends that you get vaccinated even if you have already had COVID-19. While you have some natural immunity after recovering from COVID-19, it is not known how long this protection will last. So the vaccine can help protect you after that.

## **What has been the experience of other employees in health care and long-term care who have already received the COVID vaccine?**

As of March 1, 2021, 2.75 million doses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccine have been administered in Illinois and over 50.7 million doses have been administered nationwide. Of that entire number, there have been only a handful of what would be considered serious allergic reactions. All were treatable and none were comparable to the often severe consequences of COVID-19. Distribution of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine has begun and is expected to be in use in Illinois soon.

## **What are the most common COVID-19 vaccine side effects?**

The COVID-19 vaccine may cause side effects, but they should go away within a few days. This does not mean you have COVID-19, but rather that the vaccine is working to build immunity. Reported side effects include pain at the injection site, fever, headache, muscle aches and pains. The Johnson and Johnson vaccine has fewer reported side effects than the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines.

## **How many doses of the vaccine are needed?**

Moderna and Pfizer are two-dose vaccines; both doses are needed within the required timeframe for the vaccine to be most effective. The first shot allows the immune system to recognize the virus, the second shot strengthens the immune response. The Johnson and Johnson vaccine requires a single dose to prevent severe illness, hospitalization and death.

## **Can I still spread the virus after I am vaccinated?**

Growing evidence suggests that fully vaccinated people are less likely to have asymptomatic infection and transmit COVID to others. The CDC revised its guidance, now recommending that fully vaccinated people in a non-healthcare setting may:

- Visit with other fully vaccinated people indoors without wearing masks or physical distancing
- Visit with unvaccinated people from a single household who are at low risk for severe COVID-19 disease indoors without wearing masks or physical distancing
- Refrain from quarantine and testing following a known exposure if asymptomatic

In public spaces or at larger social gatherings, fully vaccinated people should continue to follow guidance to protect themselves and others, including wearing masks, physical distancing and washing hands often.