



Frequently Asked Questions About the Maryland COVID-19 Vaccination Plan and COVID-19 Vaccination

Updated December 7, 2020

Under Governor Larry Hogan’s direction, state agencies continually develop and update Maryland's comprehensive and coordinated prevention and response plans for COVID-19.

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) will communicate directly with the public, providing accurate information about how to protect yourself and your family from COVID-19 and updates as this situation develops.

The draft [statewide COVID-19 vaccination plan](#) focuses on two major phases of vaccine availability and distribution. Phase 1 targets those at highest risk of exposure to or developing complications from COVID-19. Phase 2 targets essential non-healthcare and transportation workers, and people at moderately higher risk of severe COVID-19 illness. Phase 3 focuses on vaccinations for the general public. The initial draft of the state plan is available [here](#).

What is a COVID-19 vaccine?

A COVID-vaccine is one way to prevent serious illness due to COVID-19. Vaccination causes your body to create antibodies without getting sick with the COVID-19 disease. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and other experts will provide recommendations on priority groups and when groups should be vaccinated. Guidance on determining and providing the vaccine to priority groups will be based on the principles included in the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) [Interim Updated Planning Guidance on Allocating and Targeting Pandemic Influenza Vaccine During an Influenza Pandemic](#).

What is Operation Warp Speed?

Operation Warp Speed is a partnership among components of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Defense to help develop, make and distribute millions of vaccine doses for COVID-19 as quickly as possible while ensuring that the vaccines are safe and effective. Operation Warp Speed has been working since the pandemic started to develop COVID-19 vaccine candidates.

How do we know the COVID-19 vaccine is safe?

The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible. Safety is a top priority while federal partners work to make a COVID-19 vaccine(s) available. Vaccines undergo a series of rigorous clinical trials using thousands of study participants to generate data and other information for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to determine their safety and effectiveness to approve or authorize for emergency use. Following approval or authorization, many vaccine safety monitoring systems watch for adverse events or possible side effects. Visit the CDC's website for more information about [ensuring the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in the U.S.](#)—including information about specific vaccine monitoring systems.

Is a COVID-19 vaccine necessary?

COVID-19 infections can be a minor hindrance or lead to severe disease or even death. There are many reasons to get vaccinated.

- Based on what we know about vaccines for other diseases, experts believe that getting a COVID-19 vaccine may help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19.
- Getting vaccinated yourself may also protect people around you, particularly people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- Getting COVID-19 may offer some natural protection, known as immunity. But experts don't know how long this protection lasts, and the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 far outweighs any benefits of natural immunity. COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an antibody response without having to experience sickness.
- Wearing masks and social distancing help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others, but these measures are not enough. Vaccines will work with your immune system so it will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed.

Why would I need a vaccine if I can do other things — like social distancing, washing my hands and wearing a mask — to prevent the virus that causes COVID-19 from spreading?

Stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines work with your immune system so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Other steps, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask and staying at least 6 feet away from others, help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following CDC's recommendations [to protect yourself and others](#) will offer the best protection from COVID-19.

What is Maryland doing to help make sure people can get vaccinated against COVID-19?

Maryland is working with partners at the federal, state, local and community level to work through the logistics of delivering, storing and administering the COVID-19 vaccine once it is

available. Maryland is also making sure that people have the information they need to be confident in deciding to get vaccinated. Key priorities include:

- Developing and regularly sharing clear and accurate information with people to make sure they understand the risks and benefits of getting vaccinated and can make informed decisions.
- Helping healthcare providers answer their patients' questions about the vaccine.
- Engaging communities and individuals in an equitable and inclusive way to ensure that people have opportunities to ask questions and get clear, accurate information about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Easy access to COVID-19 vaccines is equally critical. Maryland is working with public health professionals, healthcare providers, and other partners to make sure people can easily get a COVID-19 vaccine and that cost is not a barrier.

Does Maryland have a campaign to address any concerns people may have about getting the vaccine?

MDH is working with trusted community partners, priority group representatives and representatives of vulnerable populations to launch a public health campaign that focuses on the safety and efficacy of a vaccine. Materials under development will be thoroughly researched, easy to understand, transparent and available to all Marylanders, especially those who are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. MDH's campaign messaging will represent all regions and demographic groups and will complement communications from CDC, pharma and national, regional and community-based health organizations.

What is an emergency use authorization (EUA) and how is it used to respond to COVID-19?

In certain types of emergencies, the FDA can issue an 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. The EUA process is different from full FDA approval, clearance or licensing because the EUA standard requires significantly less data than otherwise would be required for approval, clearance or licensing by the FDA. This enables the FDA to authorize the emergency use of medical products that meet the criteria for issuance within weeks rather than months to years. It must be determined that the vaccines are safe and effective in diminishing the severity of COVID-19 symptoms to gain an FDA emergency use authorization or full licensing.

What percentage of the community needs to get vaccinated to have herd immunity to COVID-19?

Experts do not know what percentage of people would need to get vaccinated to achieve herd immunity to COVID-19. Herd immunity is a term used to describe when enough people have protection—either from previous infection or vaccination—that it is unlikely a virus or bacteria can spread and cause disease. As a result, everyone within the community is protected even if some

people don't have any protection themselves. The percentage of people who need to have protection in order to achieve herd immunity varies by disease.

How many doses of a COVID-19 vaccine will be needed? Will a second booster dose be needed?

The number of doses of a COVID-19 vaccine that will be needed will depend on the type of vaccine that is administered. The coronavirus vaccines being studied are evaluating one or two doses. When giving two doses, they are usually given approximately one month apart. Since several vaccines are likely to become available over time, it is possible that some vaccines will require one dose while others may require two doses. It is also possible that over time, additional doses of vaccine may be needed to provide continued protection. It will take ongoing evaluation over several months and years to understand how our immune systems respond to this virus and how vaccines that become available assist in that response.

Will a COVID-19 vaccine need to be given annually?

When a vaccine is authorized, we will only have information about the length of immunity for as long as people were vaccinated during the trials. For example, if the first people in the study were vaccinated in July 2020 and the vaccine is licensed in December 2020, we will only have information about the immune response up to 5 months after vaccination. The vaccine manufacturer will continue to monitor vaccine recipients for several months or more, so that over time, we will continue to get a better picture of the durability of immunity. With this information, we will be better able to understand whether vaccines against COVID-19 will require annual dosing like influenza.

How long will it take before a COVID-19 vaccine is able to prevent serious illness for the recipient?

Generally, it takes a week or two for immunity to develop following vaccination, but the specific timeline for any coronavirus vaccine will depend to some extent on which type of vaccine is licensed. For example, a live, weakened vaccine requires time to reproduce in the body, whereas an inactivated vaccine is given at a dose that will generate immunity. On the other hand, because the live, weakened vaccine reproduces to generate immunity, it might provide a more robust immune response than an inactivated vaccine.

Will there be enough vaccine for everyone?

When the FDA first authorizes or approves the use of one or more COVID-19 vaccines in the United States, there will be a limited supply, and not everyone will be able to be vaccinated right away. It is understandable how concerning this would be for people, especially for [those who are at increased risk for serious illness](#) from this virus and for their loved ones. That is why, early in the response, the [federal government began investing in select vaccine manufacturers](#) to help them increase their ability to quickly make and distribute a large amount of COVID-19 vaccine. This will allow the United States to start with as much vaccine as possible and continually increase the supply in the weeks and months to follow. The goal is for everyone to be able to easily get a

COVID-19 vaccine as soon as large quantities are available. Several thousand vaccination providers will be available, including doctors' offices, retail pharmacies, hospitals, and federally qualified health centers.

How will vaccinations be distributed as part of Maryland's phased vaccination plan?

MDH will focus this plan on three major phases of vaccine availability and distribution.

Phase 1 will begin when there is limited vaccine availability and will focus on target priority groups to receive vaccination. These groups will include those at highest risk of exposure to or developing complications from COVID-19, including:

- Healthcare workers, residents and staff of long-term care facilities, first responders
- People at significantly higher risk of severe COVID-19 illness

Phase 2 will include people in critical infrastructure roles, including essential non-healthcare and transportation workers, and people at moderately higher risk of severe COVID-19 illness.

Phase 3 will be a wide-scale distribution of the vaccine associated with broad availability to the general population of the state.

The move to advanced phases will be based on the availability of COVID vaccine, achievement of targeted metrics for vaccination of higher priority groups or notification by CDC and state authorities that the general public phase can begin.

Will I have to pay for COVID-19 vaccination?

According to the CDC, vaccine doses purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars will be given to the American people at no cost. However, vaccination providers will be able to charge an administration fee for giving the shot to someone. Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund.

If you had the virus and recovered will you still need to get the vaccine?

We do not know how long antibodies last after infection or whether they will protect against reinfection. So, while vaccine trials are being completed, it will be important for scientists to continue learning about COVID-19, particularly whether people who got sick with COVID-19 can be re-infected. The current vaccine trials will include immunizing people who have never been infected with COVID-19 as well as those who have been previously infected. We will soon know whether vaccination of those who have been previously infected affords more complete or longer lasting protection than those who were previously infected but haven't been vaccinated.

Does immunity after getting COVID-19 last longer than protection from COVID-19 vaccines?

The protection someone gains from having an infection (called natural immunity) varies depending on the disease, and it varies from person to person. Since this virus is new, we don't know how long natural immunity might last. Some early evidence—based on some people—seems to suggest that natural immunity may not last very long. Regarding vaccination, we won't know how long immunity lasts until we have a vaccine and more data on how well it works. Both natural immunity and vaccine-induced immunity are important aspects of COVID-19 that experts are trying to learn more about, and the CDC will keep the public informed as new evidence becomes available.

If I get the vaccine, do I still have to wear a mask and practice social distancing?

Yes. While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it will be important for everyone to continue using all the tools available to us to help stop this pandemic, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often and staying at least 6 feet away from others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following the CDC's recommendations for [how to protect yourself and others](#) will offer the best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19. Experts need to understand more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide before deciding to change recommendations on steps everyone should take to slow the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. Other factors, including how many people get vaccinated and how the virus is spreading in communities, will also affect this decision.

Will an influenza (flu) vaccine protect me from COVID-19?

Getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19. However, flu vaccination has many other important benefits. Flu vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization and death. Getting a flu vaccine this fall will be more important than ever, not only to reduce your risk from flu but also to help conserve potentially scarce health care resources.

Why is it important to get the flu vaccine during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19, such as stay-at-home and shelter-in-place orders, have led to decreased use of routine preventive medical services, including immunization services. Ensuring that you continue or start getting routine vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential for protecting yourself and others from vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks, including flu. Routine vaccination prevents illnesses that lead to unnecessary medical visits and hospitalizations, which further strain the healthcare system.

For the upcoming flu season, flu vaccination will be very important to reduce flu because it can help reduce the overall impact of respiratory illnesses on the population and lessen the resulting burden on the healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic. A flu vaccine may also provide several individual health benefits, including keeping you from getting sick with flu, reducing the severity of your illness if you do get the flu and reducing your risk of a flu-associated

hospitalization. For more information about seasonal influenza in Maryland, visit <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/influenza/Pages/home.aspx>.

What can I do to help protect myself from getting COVID-19 until I can receive a vaccine?

You should cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others, avoid close contact with people who are sick, stay 6 feet away from others, avoid crowds and wash your hands often. Get more information about these and other steps you can take to [protect yourself and others from COVID-19](#). Marylanders are encouraged to visit covidlink.maryland.gov to learn more.

