

COVID-19 VACCINE: Frequently Asked Questions

LAST UPDATED: 2/22/2021

Vaccine Distribution

WHY ARE THE VACCINES SO IMPORTANT?

COVID-19 is now the leading cause of death in the United States. More than 7,600 Louisianans died from COVID in 2020 — that's more than the number of deaths caused by accidents, stroke and diabetes combined in Louisiana in 2017. The vaccines against this virus are a critical tool in ultimately ending the pandemic and getting our lives back to normal.

HOW IS IT DETERMINED WHO GETS THE VACCINE?

Everyone in Louisiana will have the opportunity to get vaccinated. The state is looking to the prioritization guidance from the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and then tailoring that guidance to Louisiana's context and needs.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE VACCINE RIGHT NOW?

The first round of vaccines in Louisiana (Phase 1A) is being given to hospital personnel, staff and residents of nursing homes and long-term-care facilities, and frontline responders to serve as vaccinators (Emergency Medical Services, fire personnel and law enforcement).

Vaccines are also available in a **very limited amount** to any and all of the following groups of Phase 1B, Tier 1:

- Persons 65 and older
- Dialysis providers and patients
- Ambulatory and outpatient providers and staff
 - Behavioral health providers and staff
 - Urgent care clinic providers and staff
 - Community care providers and staff
 - Dental providers and staff
 - Non-emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) providers and staff
- Professional home care providers (including hospice workers) and home care recipients (including older and younger people with disabilities over the age of 16 who receive community or home-based care, as well as clients of home health agencies)
- American Sign Language (ASL) and foreign language interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSPs) working in community and clinic-based settings, and clients who are both deaf and blind
- Health-related support personnel (lab staff, mortuary staff who have contact with corpses, pharmacy staff)
- Schools of allied health students, residents and staff
- Law enforcement and other first responders
- Louisiana Unified Command Group
- State and local essential COVID emergency response personnel

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- Some elections staff ahead of March and April elections
- Teachers and any other support staff working on site in K-12 or daycare
- All pregnant persons
- Individuals ages 55-64 with at least one of the conditions listed by the CDC as placing them at an “increased risk of severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19”
 - Cancer
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
 - Down syndrome
 - Heart conditions including but not limited to heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathies
 - Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant
 - Obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 30kg/m² or higher but less than 40kg/m²)
 - Severe obesity (BMI greater than 40kg/m²)
 - Sickle cell disease
 - Smoking
 - Type 2 diabetes mellitus

WHO IS NEXT IN LINE FOR THE VACCINE?

In no particular order, the next groups who will be eligible to receive vaccines (Phase 1B, Tier 2) are:

- Judiciary personnel
- Frontline essential government personnel
- Department of Homeland Security personnel, National Guard (non-COVID deployed, federal intelligence and security personnel, military personnel)
- Corrections officers and jailers
- Homeless shelter and other congregate group home/center staff
- Institutes of higher education faculty and staff
- Clergy
- Food processing and agricultural workers
- Veterinarians and veterinary support staff
- Postal personnel
- Public transit workers
- Grocery store workers and other deemed frontline essential workers

LDH will make an announcement when vaccines becomes available to these groups.



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WHEN CAN I, BUSINESSES AND/OR THE GENERAL PUBLIC GET THE VACCINE?

LDH is following prioritization guidance from ACIP and continues to review and consider how best to apply this guidance to Louisiana. This is a fluid process, and allocation may evolve depending on the amount of vaccine that is ultimately available to Louisiana.

The vaccine is likely to become more widely available for the general population in late spring/summer 2021. When this happens, having a large portion of the population vaccinated is our best shot at a return to some form of normalcy. Based on conversations with our federal partners, we are encouraged that Louisiana will receive enough doses to vaccinate everyone who wants a shot.

WILL THE VACCINE BE HARD TO FIND? HOW WILL THE VACCINE BE DISTRIBUTED?

LDH has been working closely with the private and public sector, including pharmacies, hospitals and nursing homes, in making the vaccine available at locations in both urban and rural communities throughout the state. HHS has also partnered with national pharmacy chains, and expects to partner with independent pharmacies and regional chains to ensure access.

Louisiana has also been preparing for COVID vaccination clinics throughout flu season. We have held drive-thru flu shot clinics across the state as a “test run” for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Information about vaccine distribution and administration can change quickly. LDH is committed to transparency about the vaccine, including safety concerns, and will continuously educate the public and address questions the public may have.

[Vaccine Administration](#)

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST TO GET VACCINATED?

While we remain in the pandemic, the federal government has ensured that vaccines are made available to those in need without cost to the individual. A provider cannot ask a patient for payment, though they can bill insurance for a vaccine administration fee or the federal government if the person is uninsured. A provider also may not bill for a regular office visit to administer the vaccine.

WHO WILL ADMINISTER THE VACCINE?

The vaccine will be administered by qualified healthcare professionals. For example, vaccinations for hospital staff are being done on site by the hospital. When it becomes available for nursing homes, CVS and Walgreens will distribute the doses to the facilities and administer the vaccines to the residents. As more vaccine becomes available, people will be able to get it at their doctor’s offices, community clinics and pharmacies.



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HOW AND WHEN WILL NURSING HOME RESIDENTS BE VACCINATED?

All Louisiana nursing homes have signed onto a partnership between the federal government, CVS and Walgreens that calls for pharmacy workers to administer the vaccine in long-term care facilities. The Moderna vaccine is being used in that partnership. As of December 28, 2020, nursing homes began receiving the first 35,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine, which are available to both nursing home residents and staff.

WHERE CAN I FIND A PROVIDER TO RECEIVE THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

To locate a provider, you can go to the Louisiana Department of Health website at covidvaccine.la.gov.

I DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET OR A DEVICE CONNECTED TO THE INTERNET. HOW CAN I FIND A PROVIDER?

You can call 211. Operators at the call center will help you locate a vaccine provider in a location that works for you and provide contact information for the provider.

DO I HAVE TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT OR CAN I JUST WALK IN?

Patients who arrive without an appointment will not be vaccinated. Vaccinations are **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY**. Forming lines during a pandemic is not safe; also, providers need to be able to plan for their vaccinations.

Patients can make an appointment by contacting participating providers, but vaccine supplies remain extremely limited. We appreciate everyone's patience, especially with providers that are newly taking on this challenge. You can find a provider at the Louisiana Department of Health website at covidvaccine.la.gov.

CAN I ONLY GET A VACCINE AT A PHARMACY OR ARE THERE OTHER LOCATIONS WHERE I CAN GO?

There are now 501 providers receiving very limited doses of the COVID-19 vaccine: 168 chain pharmacies, 138 independent pharmacies, 47 hospitals, 45 public health providers, 24 urgent cares, 23 federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), 18 community events, 16 medical practices, 12 rural health clinics (RHCs), and 10 other healthcare providers. All nine public health regions and 64 parishes of the state have at least one vaccination site.

The Department of Health has enrolled more than 2,000 providers — hospitals, pharmacies, clinics, nursing homes and others — who are now ready to administer the COVID vaccine. The result is a comprehensive network of providers who can administer the vaccine in all parishes of the state. Once there is enough vaccine to distribute to this network of vaccine providers, all Louisiana residents will have convenient access to a vaccination.

HOW DO I REGISTER FOR THE VACCINE?

The State of Louisiana is not registering people to get a vaccine. Pharmacies and other places that offer the vaccine may create their own, individual registration or appointment process.



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WHAT DO I DO IF THERE IS NO PROVIDER NEAR ME?

The Department of Health is working every day to enroll more providers in the COVID vaccination program. Our goal is to have at least one provider enrolled in every parish.

WILL THE PROVIDER KEEP A WAITING LIST OF REGISTRANTS ONCE IT RUNS OUT OF VACCINE?

Some participating providers are allowing people to add their names to a waiting list once additional vaccines become available.

DO I HAVE TO GO TO A PHARMACY IN MY PARISH?

No. You can make an appointment with any pharmacy that has the vaccine.

HOW MANY DOSES DOES EACH PHARMACY HAVE?

Beginning with the January 4 allocation of vaccines to pharmacies, the vast majority of pharmacy providers received 100 doses during each week of allocations.

I HAVE HEARD THAT I MIGHT NEED TO GET MORE THAN ONE SHOT TO BE VACCINATED. IS THIS TRUE?

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are in two doses, administered 3 or 4 weeks apart. You will get the necessary information about the second dose when you get your initial vaccine. The second dose is very important. One dose will not provide long-term protection. People vaccinated with the Pfizer vaccine will receive the second dose 21 days after the first dose. Those getting the Moderna vaccine will receive the second dose 28 days after the first dose.

DO I HAVE TO GO BACK TO THE SAME PROVIDER FOR THE SECOND DOSE?

Yes. The provider where you received your first dose will have the record of that vaccination. When you receive your first vaccine, you should also plan with your provider about getting your second dose. Most providers have the capability to notify first-dose recipients about when they are due for the second dose, but you should also be sure you have a plan when you have an opportunity to get the first dose and can speak to the provider. You will also receive a card with information about the brand of vaccine you received (Moderna or Pfizer) and when you need the second dose. It is important that the second dose be the same brand as the first dose.

If you received the first dose in another state and it is absolutely impossible to return for the second dose, you may reach out to vaccine providers in your area to ask if you can be accommodated for the second dose.

IF I HAVE ALREADY HAD COVID-19 AND RECOVERED, DO I STILL NEED TO GET VACCINATED WITH A COVID-19 VACCINE?

If you have already had COVID-19 and recovered, you should still get a vaccine. Due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19 and the fact that re-infection with COVID-19 is possible, vaccines are an important tool to protect yourself. Experts also do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after

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recovering from COVID-19, and natural immunity varies from person to person. Some early evidence suggests natural immunity may not last very long.

[After Getting the Vaccine](#)

I HAVE HEARD THERE MAY BE SIDE EFFECTS. WHAT ARE THEY?

Minor side effects are a **normal sign** the body is building protection. You may experience pain and swelling in the arm, fever, chills, tiredness or a headache; most side effects will go away in a few days or less.

The likelihood of experiencing a serious side effect is less than 0.5%. A single serious side effect following a vaccination has been reported to the CDC: The person reported gastrointestinal distress and lightheadedness, and recovered after a brief hospital stay.

WILL I STILL NEED TO WEAR A MASK AND PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING?

Yes, you will still need to wear a mask and practice social distancing even after receiving both doses. Masks are especially important due to the COVID variants circulating in the U.S. CDC now says tight-fitting is better than loose, multiple layers are better and two masks are better.

While we know that vaccines provide a very high degree of protection from becoming sick, there is not enough research to know with certainty whether a vaccinated person can continue to spread the virus if they are exposed.

WILL I STILL NEED TO QUARANTINE IF I AM EXPOSED TO SOMEONE WHO IS INFECTED WITH COVID-19?

People who have been fully vaccinated against coronavirus with two doses of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine do not have to quarantine if they are exposed to someone infected with the virus. However, they should still take precautions such as wearing a mask and practicing social distancing. For people who live in congregate settings such as nursing homes, the Department of Health still recommends quarantine for anyone who has been exposed.

[Vaccine Development and Safety](#)

HOW DOES THE VACCINE WORK?

Unlike many vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccine does not contain a dead or a weakened virus that triggers an immune response. Instead, the COVID-19 vaccine contains a genetic instruction manual that tells your immune system how to respond and protect you from exposure to the actual virus.

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The technology used in the vaccines is not new. It is called mRNA, or messenger RNA, and it has been around for decades. This is the first time mRNA has been used in a vaccine, but the effect is the same as other vaccines: Your body gets protection without the serious consequences of a severe illness due to COVID-19 exposure.

ARE THE VACCINES EFFECTIVE?

Based on evidence from clinical trials, the Pfizer vaccine is 95% effective and the Moderna vaccine is 94.1% effective at preventing COVID-19. The cutoff for FDA approval is 50%. This level of efficacy is very encouraging.

The CDC will continue to provide updates as it learns more about how the vaccines work in real-world conditions.

ARE THE VACCINES SAFE? WHAT DOES FDA AUTHORIZATION MEAN?

Vaccines are authorized for use by the FDA. The FDA authorization means that trials have proven the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines as a safe and effective defense against COVID-19. The FDA and ACIP will continue to monitor safety and effectiveness data.

No steps were skipped during the clinical trials and data review process for COVID-19 vaccines. Safety is a top priority. The COVID vaccines are being held to the same standards as other vaccines to make sure they are safe.

ARE THE VACCINES OK FOR CHILDREN?

As of now, there is no vaccine for children, though the Pfizer vaccine has been approved for teenagers 16 years of age or older. Until there's a vaccine safely tested for children, there will not be a vaccine for children.

ARE THE VACCINES OK IF I AM PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING?

There have not been specific studies on the vaccines in pregnant persons or breastfeeding persons, but there also has been no indication that there are negative effects for this population. Pregnant and breastfeeding persons should discuss whether they should receive their vaccine with their providers.

CAN THE VACCINES AFFECT MY FERTILITY?

There is zero evidence that the COVID vaccine affects fertility. The vaccine tells the body how to fight the protein that is on the outside of the coronavirus, but this protein is completely different from the protein that allows for successful reproduction. The antibodies your body produces to fight the coronavirus will not attack reproductive proteins.



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HOW CAN I TRUST A VACCINE THAT WAS DEVELOPED SO QUICKLY?

The COVID-19 vaccines are being developed faster than other vaccines because there is worldwide urgency, and because there was ample research in recent years into coronaviruses — the same viruses that were behind SARS and MERS outbreaks. Once Chinese scientists were able to create a genetic map of the coronavirus, scientists at Pfizer and Moderna were able to use that information to create a vaccine that would replicate the spike proteins the coronavirus uses to infect cells and tell the body how to fight it.

More resources than usual are available to manufacturers to accelerate vaccine development because of the pandemic, including the U.S. government's commitment to buy vaccine doses up front. These accelerations will not impact vaccine safety.