



## FAQs About the COVID-19 Vaccine

Californians have worked hard to help slow the spread of COVID-19. The State is making safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines available. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is leading California's vaccine efforts in partnership with all 58 California counties. We will update the Questions and Answers below as new information is available.

There are three sections in this document to help you find what you are looking for. Click a link below to jump to each section, or just scroll through the whole document.

[Section 1: Vaccine Supply, Safety, and How Vaccines Work](#)

[Section 2: Who is Eligible for the Vaccine, and How to Get It](#)

[Section 3: Consent, Privacy, and Other Legal Questions](#)

### **Section 1: Vaccine Supply, Safety, and How COVID-19 Vaccines Work**

#### **Q1. Does California have COVID-19 vaccines?**

A1. Yes, there currently are three (3) vaccines available in California: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Janssen (also known as Johnson & Johnson). Scientists are working to create other COVID-19 vaccines. Please note that vaccine supplies are limited.

#### **Q2. How are the vaccines given?**

A2. All three vaccines are given as shots into a muscle. The most common spot is your upper arm. Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna both require two shots, and Janssen requires one shot. For the vaccines that require two shots, the person giving you your first shot will help you arrange an appointment for your second shot.

#### **Q3. What vaccine is the best one to get? Will I have a choice?**

A3. The best vaccine you can get is the one you can get first! All three vaccines offer strong protection against serious illness, hospitalizations and death. Until more supplies of the vaccines are available, you should get whichever vaccine is available at the time of your vaccination appointment. Please be aware that the vaccines take about two weeks to protect you after you get your last shot.

**Q4. Are there enough vaccines for everyone in California?**

A4. Right now, there are not enough vaccines for all Californians who want to get vaccinated. See [Section 3](#) of this document to learn who can get the vaccine first and how you can prove you are eligible. It is important to know that just because someone is eligible for a vaccine does not mean that a vaccine is available when they want it.

**Q5. What does the COVID-19 vaccine do? How does it work?**

A5. All three vaccines offer strong protection against what matters most: serious illness, hospitalizations and death. Studies show them to be about 95 percent effective. None of these vaccines provide 100 percent protection for everyone.

The vaccines work by teaching your immune system how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. It typically takes a few weeks after vaccination for the body to build protection (immunity) against the virus.

Getting the COVID-19 vaccine AND taking steps like wearing a mask, social distancing, and washing your hands are the best ways to protect yourself and the people you love.

**Q6. Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?**

A6. Yes, the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. Vaccines save lives and help reduce hospitalizations. Scientists, the federal government, and a group of experts in several western states make sure each vaccine is safe before it is approved to be used in California. Millions of people in California and the United States have safely received COVID-19 vaccines.

As Californians learn more about how safe and effective the COVID-19 vaccines are, we hope as many people as possible will choose to get the vaccine.

**Q7. Does the vaccine work (is it effective)?**

A7. Yes, in general, the vaccines work very well. Every vaccine is different. It is very important to follow your doctor's instructions for each vaccine so it works the way it is supposed to. If you need to get two shots, then you have to get both shots before your vaccine is most effective. Please be aware that the vaccines take about two weeks to protect you after you get your last shot.

It is important to wear a face covering, practice social distancing, and wash hands frequently EVEN after you get a vaccine. While you might not get sick yourself, other people may have not been vaccinated yet.

**Q8. Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?**

A8. No, the vaccines cannot give you COVID-19. You might hear about some people who got COVID-19 even though they had the vaccine. This is because the vaccine did not have enough time to work and provide protection before they caught COVID-19, not because the vaccine gave it to them.

**Q9. Will the vaccine alter my DNA?**

A9. No, COVID-19 vaccines will not change your DNA.

**Q10. Will the vaccines make me feel sick or give me side effects?**

A10. You may have some side effects, which are normal signs that your body is building protection. These side effects may affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. Some people have no side effects.

Common side effects are pain, redness or swelling on the arm where you got the shot, or tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever or nausea. Talk to your doctor about taking over-the-counter medicine, such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, aspirin, or antihistamines, for any pain and discomfort you may experience after getting vaccinated.

If you are worried about feeling sick or having an allergic reaction, talk with your doctor before getting the vaccine. Talk to your doctor first if you have a history of allergic reactions to shots, or if you have any questions.

**Q11. How long does it take for the vaccine to work (protect you)?**

A11. Two of the vaccines require you to get two shots before they can protect you. The Janssen vaccine only requires one shot. All the vaccines need about two weeks to fully protect you after you get your last shot. It is important to wear a mask and follow social distancing rules EVEN after you get the vaccine.

**Q12. Where can I find more information about the COVID-19 vaccines?**

A12. Good resources for vaccine information are:

- Each of the approved vaccines are described here: [U.S. COVID-19 Vaccine Product Information | CDC](#)
- <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>
- You can also call the Statewide COVID-19 Hotline: (833) 422-4255
- [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) COVID-19 Vaccines Home Page](#)

**Q13. What are the “monoclonal antibody” treatments for COVID-19 I have heard about in the news?**

A13. The federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved two monoclonal antibody treatments for people who have mild cases of COVID-19, but have a high risk (because of their age or health condition) of getting very sick and needing to go to the hospital. These treatments work by attaching to parts of the COVID-19 virus to help your immune system better recognize and fight off the COVID-19 virus.

If you test positive for COVID-19 and your doctor(s) thinks you are at risk of getting very sick, you might be referred to get this treatment. The treatment is given through intravenous (IV) infusion. The infusion and observation lasts about 2 hours, and you go home the same day. If your doctor thinks you need this treatment, the doctor will have a list of treatment locations near you.

## Section 2: Who is Eligible and Where to Get a Vaccine

### Q1: Who will be vaccinated first?

A1: Supply of vaccines is limited, so California has a plan for who can be vaccinated first. This plan uses age and risk to decide what groups of people need to be vaccinated first. As more vaccines become available, more groups of people will be allowed to get their vaccines. California's latest vaccination plan is here: <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>.

The State has prioritized:

- Healthcare workers
- Long-term care residents (including regional center consumers) and staff
  - This includes individuals living in Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs), Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs), Adult Residential Facilities for Persons with Special Health Care Needs (ARFPSHNs) and other licensed residential facilities
- People who are 65 and older
- Community health workers:
  - Home health care and in-home supportive services workers
  - Community health workers, including promotoras
  - Supported living services staff
  - Family Home Agencies and contractors
  - Congregate Living Health Facilities staff
  - People providing in-home services, like respite, applied behavioral analysis, independent living skills training, and Early Start services
  - Regional Center staff with direct client contact
  - Teachers and people who work in other essential jobs
- Family member care givers of regional center clients. See Answer 3 in this section (below).
- Starting March 15, 2021, all RC consumers ages 16 thru 64 are eligible, according to [the State's vaccination plan](#). *However, vaccine supply is limited, so being eligible does not guarantee a vaccine is available.*

### Q2. When can providers serving regional center consumers get the vaccine?

A2. Many providers who work in long-term care facilities are part of the first group of people to get the vaccine. These providers include:

- Staff and residents of Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) for people who need non-continuous nursing supervision and supportive care
- Other licensed adult residential facilities
- The following community health workers:
  - Home health care and in-home supportive services workers
  - Community health workers, including promotoras
  - Supported living services staff
  - Family Home Agencies and contractors

- Congregate Living Health Facilities staff
- People providing in-home services, like respite, applied behavioral analysis, independent living skills training, and Early Start services

**Q3. Will any family member caregivers of regional center consumers be able to get the vaccines?**

A3. Yes. To show that you are a family caregiver who is eligible for the vaccine as a health care provider, you must get a letter from your regional center and take it with you to the vaccination site. You also can get documentation from your family member's doctor. Family caregivers also may be eligible for vaccination if they are an IHSS worker or if they are 65 or older. Please contact your family member's service coordinator if you have questions about the documentation needed to verify your eligibility.

**Q4. How do I get a letter from my regional center to prove eligibility for the vaccine?**

A4. Regional centers have been directed to provide personalized eligibility verification letters to their consumers ages 16 through 64 who are not already known to have been vaccinated. You do not need to request a letter. It will come to you from the regional center, by email or postal service. Regional centers have been provided a standardized template letter. You should bring this letter with you to any vaccination appointment in case it is needed as proof of eligibility at vaccine sites. Forgeries or altered copies won't work.

The letter must be in English since it is an official state document that vaccination sites need to be able to read and understand. However, information about the letter (including these FAQs and a summary of the directive to regional centers) will be translated into a variety of languages and posted on the DDS website to make it easier to share.

**Q5. When can I be vaccinated?**

A5. Regional centers are working with local county health officials to vaccinate consumers and staff who are eligible for vaccines. Not all counties will be vaccinating the same eligible groups at the same time. Each county decides when people can be vaccinated based upon how many vaccines they have available. This means that you might not be able to get your vaccine right away, depending on where you live, even if you are eligible.

Regional centers already are reaching out to consumers who are over 65, or their families and conservators, to help them access the vaccine. As more people become eligible for the vaccine, regional centers will reach out to them too. People ages 16 and up who meet certain criteria become eligible beginning on March 15, 2021. Being eligible does not mean that a vaccine actually will be available to you whenever you want to go get one. Vaccine supply is limited.

Large vaccination sites, your doctor, a local pharmacy, and special clinics are places you can get a vaccine, as explained in Answer 6 (next). Also, every Californian can sign up at <https://myturn.ca.gov/> or call (833) 422-4255 to see if it's their turn to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Even if you're not currently eligible, you can sign up to be notified when it is your turn.

#### **Q6. Where can I be vaccinated?**

A6. California is working closely with community partners and stakeholders to help decide how and where vaccines will be given. County health departments and large health care plans are responsible for administering the COVID-19 vaccines consistent with the State's priorities. California wants to make sure vaccines are given fairly and in communities that need it the most.

The latest information on vaccination sites is available here: [Vaccines - Coronavirus COVID-19 Response \(ca.gov\)](#). Some examples are:

- Large vaccination sites like stadiums, arenas or fairgrounds
- Smaller, local sites like pharmacies, doctor's offices or clinics
- A variety of other community locations that may be appropriate like churches, community centers, or regional centers
- Sites that are designated for certain populations, such as those arranged by a regional center for people with disabilities.
- In-home options are being developed too, for people who cannot receive in-home vaccination from their health plan.

### **Section 3: Consent, Privacy, and Other Legal Questions**

#### **Q1. Is consent required to get the vaccine?**

A1. Yes, your consent is required to get the vaccine.

#### **Q2. Who can give consent for a person receiving services from a regional center?**

A2. Consent is given by the person who can make medical decisions. This may include:

- An adult regional center consumer can give their own consent. Consumers can ask for help from a family member or other individual they trust
- If needed, a consumer can [ask the State Council on Developmental Disabilities](#) to appoint an authorized representative to help them make decisions
- Parents or legal guardians of minor children
- People allowed under a Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare
- Conservators of adults, if the court has given the conservator the right to make medical treatment decisions
- In some cases, a regional center Executive Director, when the person is unable to and no one else can

**Q3. Is my privacy protected if I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

A3. Yes. California law says you can't be identified, unless you consent to sharing your information.

**Q4. Do I have to get the vaccine? Is it mandatory?**

A4. No, you do not have to get the vaccine. The state and federal government do not mandate (require) vaccination. Employers cannot mandate vaccination either. [See Answer 12 in this section \(Section 3\) for more about employers.](#)

Experts think it is a good idea to get vaccinated because studies show the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and very good at protecting people from COVID-19. Please see Section 1 for important safety information about the COVID-19 vaccines.

[Please also see Question #8 below.](#)

**Q5. How old do you have to be to get a vaccine?**

A5. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is approved for people 16 years or older. The Moderna and Janssen vaccines are approved for people 18 years or older. The person giving your vaccine shots will know which one is right for you.

**Q6. I do not want my child to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. Is this okay?**

A6. For now, only people age 16 and older can get the COVID-19 vaccine. As a parent or legal guardian, you decide if your child gets the vaccine.

It is very important to protect yourself and the people around you in other ways like wearing masks, staying away from large groups of people, and washing your hands often. [Visit the CDC website here for more ways to help prevent COVID-19.](#) [Please see the Questions and Answers in Section 1 \(above\)](#) for important safety information about the COVID-19 vaccines.

**Q7. What if I do not want my adult son or daughter to get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

A7. In most cases, adults with developmental disabilities can choose if they want to get vaccinated.

If a consumer is conserved, the court conservatorship order will say if a conservator has the legal right to make "medical treatment" decisions like getting a vaccine. [Please see the Questions and Answers in Section 1 \(above\)](#) for important safety information about the COVID-19 vaccines.

**Q8. What if I don't want the COVID-19 vaccine because of my disability and/or a medical condition?**

A8. If you have an underlying medical condition or a history of allergic reactions to other vaccinations, it is important that you talk to your health care provider(s) about your vaccination options. Adults of any age with certain disabilities and/or medical conditions have a higher risk of getting very sick or dying from COVID-19, so you should make an informed decision about whether or not to get a vaccine.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [suggests](#) people with underlying medical conditions can receive the vaccine as long as they have not had [an immediate or severe allergic reaction](#) to a COVID-19 vaccine, or any of the vaccine ingredients.

**Q9. Can my service provider(s) require me to get the COVID-19 vaccination or give me a 30-day notice if I don't get one?**

A9. People must consent to getting the vaccine. The [law](#) requires service providers to respect consumer choices. [Regulations](#) give consumers the right to accept or reject medical care and health-related services like vaccines, except in certain cases. Service providers can require participants to follow safety guidelines including wearing a mask, washing hands and maintaining 6-feet of social distance.

There are limited reasons why a residential provider can give a 30-day notice and specific [regulatory procedures](#) providers must follow. Service providers cannot require you to receive the COVID-19 vaccination.

If you think your rights are being denied, there is a [regulatory process](#) that must be followed. The [Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy](#) (OCRA) may be able to help. You can use the numbers below to call OCRA:

- Northern California 1-800-390-7032 (TTY 877-669-6023)
- Southern California 1-866-833-6712 (TTY 877-669-6023)
- Or you can directly call the advocate for your regional center at the number listed on the [OCRA staff links page](#).

**Q10. Can residential providers be held liable for helping individuals they serve get the vaccine?**

A10. Consent for the vaccine is required. If a consumer or their legal guardian provides consent, helping that person get their COVID-19 vaccine does not create liability, and may help protect the health of other residents in the home.

**Q11. What if I am being pressured by my roommate because I did not get, or do not want to get, the COVID-19 vaccine?**

A11. You have the right to decide if you want to get the vaccine. A roommate may pressure you to be vaccinated, but the choice is yours. Similarly, your roommate also has the right to choose if they get the vaccine.

**Q12. Can my employer ask me to show proof I've had a COVID-19 vaccination?**

A12. Federal Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission (EEOC) [guidance](#) says your employer may ask you to provide information about whether you have been vaccinated, such as providing a vaccine card. The vaccine card does not have any information about your health or medical condition(s). Your employer is not allowed to ask for any information about your health or medical condition(s). The EEOC guidance also explains that employers must provide reasonable accommodations to employees who refuse to be vaccinated because of a disability or their religious beliefs.

