Q&A : COVID-19 Vaccines

1. Are the vaccines safe?
   - Yes. The benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks for the vast majority of adults. The vaccines were made using RNA technology that was developed nearly 20 years ago. The vaccine trials included thousands of adults of diverse ages and ethnicities and monitored them closely for months. The goal of vaccination is first to avoid illness (especially hospitalization and death due to COVID-19) and second to avoid spreading COVID-19 to others.
   - Those with compromised immune systems due to stable HIV infection or medications may consider vaccination and should discuss this with a healthcare provider.
   - Since the vaccine is made of mRNA, it cannot enter the nucleus of the cell or interfere with the DNA of the person receiving it.

2. Are the vaccines effective?
   - Yes. By taking an available COVID-19 vaccine as scheduled in the 2-dose series, efficacy is nearly 95%. This level of protection requires 1-2 weeks after the 2nd dose. This is an excellent result and is close to the efficacy of the measles vaccine in preventing measles. We currently do not know the long-term efficacy of the vaccine years from now.

3. Currently, who should receive a COVID-19 vaccine?
   - Tier 1 A (per Texas Department of State Health Services):
     - Those working in healthcare environments such as hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes
     - Residents of long-term care facilities
   - Tier 1 B:
     - Those age 65 or older
     - Age 16-65 with one or more chronic medical conditions such as: cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart problems such as coronary artery disease and heart failure, type 2 diabetes, chronic kidney disease, sickle cell disease, obesity (Body Mass Index of 30 kg/m² or higher), organ transplant, and pregnancy
     - Frontline essential workers not involved in healthcare

4. What are common side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?
   - Details on potential side effects and treatment may be accessed at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/expect/after.html
• Some people may experience post-vaccination symptoms of feeling dizzy or light-headed within 15 minutes of receiving the vaccine. **You will be monitored closely for at least 15 minutes after receiving the injection.**

• Soreness at the injection site, low grade fever and chills, fatigue, headache, and muscle aches may occur for up to 3 days after the injection, with most of these side effects typically occurring the day after vaccination. A stronger side effect response may be experienced after the 2nd dose.

5. **Who should NOT receive a COVID-19 vaccine?**

For people with history of an **immediate reaction** to any mRNA vaccines, polysorbate, or polyethylene glycol, consultation with an Allergy/Immunology specialist is advised before vaccination.

If someone had **anaphylaxis** (confusion, trouble breathing, wheezing, low blood pressure, itching, swelling of the face and tongue, vomiting, and/or diarrhea) within 30 minutes of the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, then the second dose should not be given.

Current vaccines are **not approved for children** due to lack of safety data. The Pfizer vaccine is approved for emergency use in ages 16 and older. The Moderna vaccine is approved for emergency use in ages 18 and older.

If you are **still recovering from COVID**, it is estimated that you are immune from re-infection for at least 3 months. Do not obtain a vaccine while still feeling sick from the original COVID infection.

If you had COVID in the last 3 months and received **treatment with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent serum from donors**, then wait at least 90 days from time of treatment.

The vaccines do not contain latex or egg and are safe for people with these allergies.

There are no documented cases of Guillain-Barre syndrome following vaccination.

Anyone with a history of a severe reaction to any vaccine should be monitored for 30 minutes after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

6. **Do I need a COVID-19 test before the vaccine?**

• **No.** If you are otherwise feeling well and had no recent high risk exposure to someone infected in the last 14 days, then there is no need for a test.

• After vaccination, there is no need for an antibody test to confirm immunity.

7. **Do I need a pregnancy test before the vaccine?**
• No. Vaccine safety has not been studied in large populations of pregnant women. However, pregnant women who are infected with COVID-19 are at increased risk of severe outcomes to themselves and to the developing baby. The vaccine is not a “live” virus, so it will not infect the developing baby or enter the breast milk. If there are concerns, please discuss with your healthcare provider.

• For those who are lactating/breast-feeding, there is no need to stop.

• For those planning pregnancy, there is no need to avoid or delay plans.

8. Within the last 14 days, I was exposed to COVID by close contact with someone who is infected. Will the vaccine prevent post-exposure infection?

• No. The vaccine will not prevent infection from the recent high-risk exposure since it takes days to weeks to respond effectively to the vaccine. Please quarantine at home and monitor for symptoms to reduce the risk of infecting others. If there are no signs or symptoms of infection in the 14 days after exposure, then you can proceed with vaccination.

9. Can I receive the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as a flu vaccine?

• It is best to avoid receiving any other vaccines for at least 14 days before or after the COVID-19 vaccine unless there is a compelling reason, such as outbreak of another vaccine-preventable infectious disease.

10. I missed by 2nd dose. Do I need to repeat the first dose?

• No. There is a “grace” period of 4 days from the time it was due. Even if past the 4-day period, please obtain the 2nd dose as soon as possible from the time it was due.

11. I received my 2 dose series of vaccine. Can I go back to my normal life again?

• Not yet but hopefully soon. The vaccines are highly effective but there is no 100% guarantee that you will not get COVID-19 after vaccination. Experts indicate that until at least 70% of the population is immune, the virus can still spread in an uncontrolled manner. The CDC advises to continue strategies to keep you and your loved ones, friends, and co-workers healthy by wearing a mask, keeping a 6-foot distance from others, avoiding crowds, staying home when not feeling well, and washing hands routinely. If we all do our part, then the pandemic will end sooner rather than later.

Sources: