

What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine

Keck Medicine of USC has been working with university leadership to plan for COVID-19 vaccines, including how to distribute the vaccine in the most widely beneficial way possible.

Some details of the complex, fast-moving program are still being finalized. Initial supplies of the vaccine will be limited. Distribution is currently underway, and is prioritized for people with the greatest need.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Is the vaccine safe?**
In clinical trials for vaccines produced by pharmaceutical companies Pfizer and Moderna, participants did not experience any life-threatening events that were attributed to the vaccine. Keck Medicine will continue to monitor data as it becomes available.
- **When will I be able to get the vaccine?**
Keck Medicine is following recommendations from both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the California Department of Public Health on how to distribute of the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccines are being rolled out in phases, beginning with groups of people who are at higher risk for COVID-19. Currently, Keck Medicine is vaccinating health care workers. Keck Medicine will begin vaccinating patients in the next few weeks in its patient vaccination clinic. Essential workers — such as teachers, grocery store workers, corrections officers and select others — and older adults will be prioritized in the first phase of patient vaccination, with other groups of people included in subsequent phases. If you are a Keck Medicine patient, you will receive a communication informing you when you are eligible for vaccination.
- **Do people need to wear a mask after getting the vaccine?**
Yes, people should still wear masks even after receiving the vaccine. Until we learn more about the protection COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it will be important for everyone to continue wearing a mask, washing hands often, and staying at least 6 feet away from others.
- **Who is receiving the vaccine first?**
Keck Medicine is following the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the California Department of Public Health for phased distribution of the vaccine. The first group of people to receive the vaccine includes health care workers and residents and staff of long-term care facilities.
- **Can children receive the vaccine?**
At this time, we do not have data about children and this vaccine. Some of the vaccines are currently running trials for children, but we do not have the results of that data yet.

Vaccines are crucial tools in the fight against deadly infectious diseases. When the vaccine becomes available to you, we strongly encourage that you receive it.

For more information, visit:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>

California Department of Public Health: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID-19Vaccine.aspx>

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/docs/about/FAQ-Vaccine.pdf>

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- **What side effects should people expect after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Some physical side effects are normal after receiving the vaccine. People may experience local site inflammation, fever, headaches, muscle pain and body aches. These symptoms are more frequent after the second dose. The symptoms typically resolve within 1-2 days.
- **If I have a history of Bell's palsy, should I get the vaccine?**

According to the FDA, there is no clear evidence that the vaccine causes Bell's palsy, a condition that causes weakness or paralysis of facial muscles. If you have a history of Bell's palsy, talk to your primary care doctor to discuss your options. Keck Medicine has vaccinated over 4,000 members of our workforce and, to date, they have had no adverse reactions.
- **If I am pregnant, is the vaccine safe? What about if I am breastfeeding?**

According to the CDC, mRNA vaccines, such as those produced by Pfizer and Moderna, are unlikely to pose a risk to people who are pregnant or to a breastfeeding infant. mRNA vaccines do not contain the live virus that causes COVID-19 and do not interact with genetic material DNA. Pregnant people are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. If you have concerns, talk to your primary care doctor to weigh the risks and benefits of the vaccine versus COVID-19 infection.
- **If I am a solid organ or stem cell transplant recipient, should I get the vaccine?**

Transplant recipients are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Talk to your primary care doctor or specialist to weigh the risks and benefits of the vaccine versus COVID-19 infection.
- **Why do the vaccines need to be administered in 2 doses?**

It's important in some diseases, like COVID-19, to prime the body to get an optimal immune response. The first dose primes the immune system — prepares the body to respond appropriately to the next dose and form antibodies. That first dose helps ensure a robust immune response that will get coded into the memory cells in the body. These are the cells that the body will rely on when exposed to COVID-19 in the future.
- **How long does the vaccine's protection last?**

As of right now, we understand that the vaccine produces a robust immune response for at least 3 months. However, as time goes by, we will learn more.
- **Will COVID-19 vaccines cause me to test positive on COVID-19 viral tests?**

No. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are mRNA-based — essentially a code that tells the body to make protein that will generate an immune response. That protein alone is not the virus, and so won't trigger a positive test result.
- **What steps are being taken to ensure safe delivery and storage of the vaccine?**

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require a cold-chain distribution system to transport and store them. Keck Medicine has developed these systems, including securing 6 specialty freezers for this purpose.
- **How will Keck Medicine employees receive the vaccine?**

Employees will be offered the vaccine at Keck Medicine locations. They will be able to make an appointment to receive both doses of the vaccine.

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- **I have a history of allergic reactions — can I receive the COVID-19 vaccine?**
 - If you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in a COVID-19 vaccine, the CDC recommends that you should not get that vaccine. You can find the ingredients and more information on the [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine](#) and the [Moderna COVID-19 vaccine](#) on the FDA website.
 - If you have had a severe allergic reaction to other vaccines or injectable therapies, ask your doctor if you should get a COVID-19 vaccine. Your doctor will help you decide if it is safe for you to get vaccinated.
 - People with a history of severe allergic reactions not related to vaccines or injectable medications — such as allergies to food, pets, venom, environments, or latex — may still get vaccinated.
 - People with a history of allergies to oral medications or a family history of severe allergic reactions, or who might have a milder allergy to vaccines (without anaphylaxis) — may also still get vaccinated.
- **I am immunocompromised — can I receive the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Current evidence shows that people whose immune systems are compromised may be more at risk for severe COVID-19. The most recent COVID-19 vaccine guidelines from the CDC state that people who are immunocompromised may receive the vaccine if they do not have any contraindications to vaccination. People who are immunocompromised should speak to their doctor about the risks and benefits of vaccination, including the potential for a decreased response to the vaccine.
- **I am receiving cancer treatment — can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

While the most recent COVID-19 vaccine guidelines from the CDC do not directly address people with cancer, they state that people who are immunocompromised (such as people undergoing cancer treatment) may receive the vaccine if they do not have any contraindications to vaccination. If you are receiving cancer treatment, you should review the risks and benefits of vaccination — including the potential for a decreased response to the COVID-19 vaccine — with your doctor.
- **Will the vaccine work against new COVID-19 variants?**

Viruses constantly change through mutation, and multiple COVID-19 mutations are circulating around the world. New variants, such as those recently identified in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and South Africa, appear to spread more easily. There is no evidence at this time that these mutations are changing the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine, however scientists are working to learn more about them.
- **Who shouldn't get the vaccine right away?**

The following groups should delay receiving the vaccine at this time:

 - Those allergic to specific ingredients in the vaccines (most notably polyethylene glycol);
 - Those who have had acute COVID-19 infection in the last 90 days;
 - Those who received monoclonal antibody for COVID-19 in the last 90 days;
 - Those who have received any other vaccination in the last 14 days.

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