

Billings Clinic COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ

Billings Clinic fully supports the use of the new COVID-19 vaccine and its role in protecting us from illness and helping to end the ongoing pandemic. We know there are plenty of questions about the vaccine and have put together the following FAQ to help.

Who gets the vaccine and what is the distribution plan? When can I get vaccinated?

We are following vaccine distribution is based on plans developed by the State of Montana, which you can read [here](#). This is a phased approach and when you can receive the vaccine is determined by which phase you qualify for. We are currently in Phase 1a.

Residents of long-term care facilities will also receive the vaccine early on through a separate federal program. Health care systems will not be the ones to distribute the vaccine for these facilities.

The vaccine requires two doses, administered 21 days apart for the Pfizer vaccine and 28 days apart for Moderna, +/- 4 days for each. Montana's [phased approach](#) to vaccine distribution is as follows:

- 1a - Health care personnel, first responders and long-term care facility residents
- 1b – Adults age 70+, people age 16+ (or 18+ for the Moderna vaccine) with certain high-risk medical conditions, American Indians and people of color who may be at elevated risk of COVID-19 complications.
- 1c – Frontline essential workers, people age 60+, people residing in congregate care or correctional facilities, people with high-risk medical conditions not included in 1b that may have an elevated risk of COVID-19 complications.
- 2 – All remaining Montanans age 16 and older

Where can I get vaccinated?

Doses from the initial allocation will only be available at the facilities to which they were shipped, per EUA and state guidance. For Billings Clinic, that means the downtown Billings campus. Facilities in the region receive their own shipments at this time.

Do I have to get the vaccine?

No. Billings Clinic strongly supports the use of the COVID-19 vaccine and encourages people to receive it if and when it is available to them. You can read more about the benefits of getting the vaccine [here](#).

How does the vaccine work?

The vaccine initiates an immune system response to begin building antibodies. It is a new form of vaccine called an mRNA vaccine, which teaches our cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response inside our bodies. You can learn more about mRNA COVID-19 vaccines from the CDC [here](#) and [here](#). The vaccine requires two doses via injection, administered 21 to 28 days apart.

Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. The only COVID-19 vaccines the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will make available for use in the United States (by approval or EUA) are those that meet rigorous standards. In addition, clinical trials have not revealed any significant safety concerns two months after the second dose. You can learn more about those standards [here](#) and read more CDC safety information [here](#). Studies and testing of the vaccines will continue beyond EUA approval.

How long after I get vaccinated does it take for the vaccine to work?

While there is no data yet from extended studies, initial information indicates that full vaccination effectiveness is attained 7 to 14 days after receiving the second dose.

Does the vaccine affect or change DNA?

No. The mRNA does not enter the cell nucleus. The mRNA in the vaccine is quickly degraded after SARS-CoV-2 spike protein is produced.

Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. None of the COVID-19 vaccines in development in the U.S. use live virus and there is no risk of them causing COVID-19. The goal for each of them is to teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19.

Are there side effects to the vaccine?

Some people may experience side effects or symptoms after vaccination. It is recommended that you schedule your vaccination the day before time off if possible. These symptoms are normal and are a sign that the body is building immunity. They include:

- Injection site pain
- Tiredness/fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Joint pain
- Fever
- Injection site swelling
- Injection site redness
- Nausea
- Feeling unwell
- Swollen lymph nodes (lymphadenopathy)

Can the vaccine cause allergic reactions?

A small number of people have experienced allergic reactions to the Pfizer vaccine. The FDA provides the following [guidance](#) on the Pfizer vaccine and [this information](#) on the Moderna vaccine, regarding allergic reactions:

You should not get the COVID-19 vaccine if you:

- Had a severe allergic reaction after a previous dose of this vaccine
- Had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient of this vaccine.
 - The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine includes the following ingredients: mRNA, lipids ((4-hydroxybutyl)azanediyl)bis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis(2-hexyldecanoate), 2 [(polyethylene glycol)-2000]-N,N-ditetradecylacetamide, 1,2-Distearoyl-sn-glycero-3- phosphocholine, and cholesterol), potassium chloride, monobasic potassium phosphate, sodium chloride, dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate, and sucrose.
 - The Moderna vaccine includes the following ingredients: messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA), lipids (SM-102, polyethylene glycol [PEG] 2000 dimyristoyl glycerol [DMG], cholesterol, and 1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine [DSPC]), tromethamine, tromethamine hydrochloride, acetic acid, sodium acetate, and sucrose.
- The CDC recommends that people with a history of severe allergic reactions not related to vaccines or injectable medications—such as allergies to food, pet, venom, environmental, 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 (no anaphylaxis)—may also still get vaccinated. If you have a severe allergic reaction after getting the first shot, you should not get the second shot. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist in allergies and immunology to provide more care or advice.

What if I've already had COVID-19? Can I still be vaccinated?

As long as you have recovered from the illness, you can receive the vaccine. There is no established time duration after recovery when individuals with COVID-19 should receive the COVID-19 vaccine, so you may receive the vaccine any time after recovering from COVID-19 (when out of isolation). It is also not recommended individuals receive the vaccine if under quarantine to prevent exposure to others. There is not currently enough information available to say if or how long after infection a person is protected from COVID-19. Early evidence suggests natural immunity from COVID-19 may not last long but more studies are needed.

Can I receive the vaccine if I received monoclonal antibody treatment?

Vaccination should be deferred for at least 90 days to avoid interference of the treatment with vaccine-induced immune responses.

What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding? Should I get the Vaccine?

The safety data on pregnant and lactating/breastfeeding women are currently unavailable. Because pregnant women are considered at risk for developing severe illness due to COVID-19, they should be vaccinated, especially HCP. There is no evidence that the mRNA vaccine is excreted into breast milk. Therefore, the benefits of vaccination are likely to outweigh any potential risks. Speak with your health care provider for additional guidance.

Do you have storage capabilities for the vaccine?

Yes. Billings Clinic has the capability to store this vaccine, including via the ultracold freezing requirements for the Pfizer vaccine.

Do I need to keep wearing a mask and following other guidelines after getting vaccinated?

Yes. We do not yet know the full behavior of this virus after a person has been vaccinated and it is not a substitute for other infection control measures. Following the existing prevention guidelines remains critical to ensuring the health and safety of others and continued to set a good example for the public. Additionally, Billings Clinic's Universal Mask Use and other guidance will remain in place even after you have been vaccinated.

Does COVID-19 vaccination stop people from catching and transmitting the virus?

We still don't know. Initial trials were designed to test for symptomatic COVID-19 and confirmed infection with the virus in subjects. Vaccine makers state that they are carrying out more studies on this important question and will release information as soon as it is available.

Will I have to get this vaccine every year?

That remains unknown. Studies on the vaccine are ongoing, including on how long it is effective for.

We will update this FAQ as new information becomes available. You can learn more about the vaccine from the CDC by clicking [here](#).