



Plain Language Edition

**What you need to
know about the
COVID-19 vaccine:
Why you need a second shot**

What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine: Why you need a second shot

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a bad disease. It makes people very sick. COVID-19 has spread around the world. A lot of people have died from COVID-19. Lots of people are still dying from COVID-19.

COVID-19 changed the way we live. We have to try and stay safe from COVID-19. That means we have to do a lot of things differently:

- People have to stay far away from each other.
- We have to stay in our homes a lot.
- We might not be able to go to school.
- We might not be able to go to work.
- If we go outside, we have to wear a mask.

These things keep us safe.

You can learn more about COVID-19 by reading [our fact sheets about it](#).

We want COVID-19 to go away. We want to go back to normal.

What is a vaccine?

A **vaccine** is a shot. It keeps you from getting sick.

Doctors give people shots to keep us from being sick.

- There is a shot to keep you from getting chicken pox.
- There is a shot to keep you from getting the measles.
- There is a shot to keep you from getting the flu.

Now there is a shot to keep you from getting COVID-19. That shot is called the COVID-19 vaccine. The **COVID-19 vaccines** help protect you against COVID-19. You can learn more about the vaccines in [our fact sheet on the COVID-19 vaccine](#).

In the United States, the COVID-19 vaccines are free. Anyone 5 years old or older can get one. The vaccines work **really well** to keep you from getting really sick with COVID-19. They work **really well** to keep you from dying from COVID-19. They also help protect you from catching COVID-19 at all.

There are different kinds of COVID-19 vaccine. You might have had 2 shots already. Or, you might have only needed to get one shot at first.

When you get vaccinated, you get a vaccine card. Your **vaccine card** tells you how many shots you have gotten. Every time you get a shot, it is written on your card. If you got 1 shot, your card will say you had 1 shot. If you got 2 shots, your card will say you got 2 shots. Your vaccine card also tells you the day(s) you got your vaccine. You can learn more about vaccine cards in [our fact sheet on vaccine cards](#).

What are other vaccines that need 2 or more shots?

There are many different types of vaccines. Each vaccine protects against one type of germ. Some of the COVID-19 vaccines come in 2 shots. These are not the only vaccines that take 2 shots to work well. Some other vaccines need 2 or more shots to work well. If you only get one of these shots, the vaccine won't work as well.

For example:

Polio is a bad disease. It can hurt or kill people. So young children get vaccinated for polio. The polio vaccine needs 4 shots to work correctly. Children usually get their 4 polio shots before they are 7 years old. Children need all 4 shots to be protected against polio.

Here are some other vaccines that need more than one shot to work correctly:

- The pneumonia vaccine needs 4 shots
- The measles vaccine needs 2 shots
- The chickenpox vaccine needs 2 shots
- The HPV vaccine needs 3 shots. HPV is a germ that can cause cancer.

You might not remember getting a lot of these vaccines. People usually get these vaccines when they are children. You usually get a lot of vaccines as a child. You usually don't get as many vaccines as an adult. It is okay not to remember what vaccines you got as a child. Just know that a lot of vaccines need 2 or more shots to work best. It's not just COVID-19 vaccines that need 2 shots to work best.

What COVID-19 vaccines need 2 shots?

In the US, there are three kinds of COVID-19 vaccines you can get. Each kind of vaccine is made by a different company. The kinds of COVID-19 vaccines are:

- Johnson & Johnson/Janssen
- Pfizer-BioNTech
- Moderna

The Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine only needs 1 shot to work properly. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine needs 2 shots to work properly. The Moderna vaccine needs 2 shots to work properly.

How do we know some COVID-19 vaccines need more than 1 shot?

Before a vaccine can be given to people, scientists have to test it. These tests are called **vaccine trials**. In a vaccine trial, people who have signed up to be part of the trial get the vaccine. Then, the scientists do tests with the people in the trial. The scientists look to see if the people's bodies can fight COVID-19. They do this by testing the people's blood. They look for COVID-19 antibodies. **COVID-19 antibodies** are tiny parts of your body that help fight COVID-19. Your body makes COVID-19 antibodies when you get a COVID-19 vaccine.

The vaccine trials for the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine found that people only need 1 shot of the vaccine. But the vaccine trials for other vaccines found that people needed 2 or more shots. People who only got 1 shot didn't make enough COVID-19 antibodies. Their bodies weren't protected enough against COVID-19. So, those vaccines need 2 or more shots to work properly.

What happens if I only get 1 COVID-19 shot when I need to get 2?

You will not be fully protected against COVID-19. You might be a little protected. But you will not have the full vaccine protection.

You will be more likely to get COVID-19. You will be more likely to get really sick with COVID-19. You will be more likely to die of COVID-19.

If you only got 1 shot of a 2-shot vaccine, you should get your second shot.

Where can I go to get a second shot for my COVID-19 vaccine?

You should go back to the same place you got your first shot. This could be:

- Your doctor's office
- A pharmacy
- A health clinic

Most of the time, when you get your first COVID-19 shot, you make an appointment to get your second COVID-19 shot. If you have an appointment for your second COVID-19 shot, make sure to go to it. If you don't have an appointment, that's okay. You can make an appointment to get your second COVID-19 shot.

If you need help making an appointment, talk to your doctor. Your doctor can help you get a second COVID-19 shot.

When can I get my second COVID-19 shot?

When you can get your second COVID-19 shot depends on which vaccine you got. If you got the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, you can get your second shot 21 days after your first shot. 21 days is 3 weeks. If you got the Moderna vaccine, you can get your second shot 28 days after your first shot. 28 days is 4 weeks.

Will I need more than 2 shots of the COVID-19 vaccine?

People can get more than 2 shots of the COVID-19 vaccine. There are 2 different ways this can happen. One of these ways is called a “third dose.” Only a few people get this. The other way is called a booster. Boosters are for everyone. We will explain both of these now.

Why do some people get a third dose?

A **third dose** is another shot from one of the 2-shot vaccines. Some people get a third dose because they are immunocompromised. **Immunocompromised** means their body needs extra help to fight germs. Immunocompromised people are more likely to get really sick with COVID-19. Immunocompromised people are more likely to die from COVID-19. Immunocompromised people don’t get as much protection from just 2 shots. So they can get a third dose to give them even more protection.

Immunocompromised people can get their third shot 28 days after their second shot. They should get the same vaccine as their first 2 shots.

If you think you are immunocompromised, talk to your doctor. Your doctor will let you know if you need a third dose.

What is a booster?

A **booster** is another shot. The COVID-19 vaccines work really well to keep you from getting really sick. They work really well to keep you from dying. But their protection goes down over time. Your body starts to forget what the vaccine taught it. When that happens, it helps to get a reminder. A booster is a reminder.

A booster is different from a second shot if you get a 2-shot vaccine. Remember, you need both shots to be fully protected. A booster helps once your protection starts to go down.

If you got the 1-shot vaccine, you can get a booster 2 months after your shot. Your booster should be 1 shot from one of the 2-shot vaccines. This will give you even more protection

If you got one of the 2-shot vaccines, you can get a booster 5 months after your second shot. You can get any COVID-19 vaccine for your booster.

Words to Know

Booster

Another shot that reminds your body how to fight a germ.

COVID-19

A bad disease that has spread around the world. It makes people very sick and can kill people.

COVID-19 antibodies

Tiny parts of your body that help fight COVID-19. Your body makes COVID-19 antibodies when you get a COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID-19 vaccine

A shot that can keep you from getting COVID-19.

Immunocompromised

When someone's body needs extra help to fight off germs

Third dose

A third dose is another shot from one of the 2-shot vaccines. Some people get a third dose because they are immunocompromised.

Vaccine

A shot a doctor gives you to keep you from getting sick.

Vaccine card

A card you get when you get your COVID-19 vaccine. It tells you how many shots you've gotten.

Vaccine trials

When scientists test a vaccine to make sure it's safe and that it works.

To Learn More

- Plain Language COVID-19 Resources: <https://autisticadvocacy.org/resources/covid-pl/>
- A Self-Advocate's Guide to COVID-19: https://gmsavt.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A_Self_Advocates_Guide_to_COVID-19_2020.pdf
- COVID-19 Vaccine Information in Plain Language: <https://gmsavt.org/resources/covid-19-vaccine-information-in-plain-language>
- COVID-19 Vaccine Facts for the Developmental Disabilities Community: <https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/publications/documents/COVID19VaccineFactsDDCommunity-F.pdf>
- "Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine" Social Story: <https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/publications/documents/GettingACOVID19VaccineSocialStoryIDD-F.pdf>
- Coronavirus/COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions: <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/AIR-Coronavirus-FAQs-508.pdf>
- Infographic about COVID-19 Vaccines: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/c/coronavirus/coronavirus-vaccines-infographic>
- Myths and Facts About the COVID-19 Vaccine: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html>
- Frequently Asked Questions about the COVID-19 Vaccine: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>
- Easy to Read COVID-19 Safety: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/easy-to-read/>
- "Care for yourself one small way each day" Fact Sheet: <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/care-for-yourself/pdfs/General-Public-Care-for-Yourself.pdf>
- COVID-19 Information for People with Developmental Disabilities:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/humandevelopment/covid-19/developmental-behavioral-disorders.html>

- COVID-19 Materials for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Care Providers: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/humandevelopment/COVID-19-Materials-for-People-with-IDD.html>
- Baltimore City Health Department infographics about variants: <https://www.facebook.com/BaltimoreHealth/photos/pcb.10159244388310642/101592443854706>
- Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health infographics about how well vaccines work: <https://www.facebook.com/JohnsHopkinsSPH/photos/pcb.10158131891551245/10158131889621245>
- [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) homepage: <https://www.vaccines.gov/>
- Variants of the Virus (CDC) (Not Easy-Read/Plain Language): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/variants.html>