

Information for Correctional Staff: Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination

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AMEND at the University of California, San Francisco, draws on the principles of public health and human rights to bring transformative change to incarceration in the U.S. Our mission is to create stronger communities by transforming prisons and jails into places of humanity, dignity, and health.

COVID-19 VACCINES: THE BASICS

- Vaccines teach the immune system how to recognize and fight off the virus that causes COVID-19. This can prevent vaccinated people from getting sick.
- When you get the vaccine you also protect other people around you by making it less likely for them to get COVID-19. Vaccines are not used to treat people who currently have COVID-19.
- There are currently three vaccines available in the United States, made by the drug companies Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson.
- The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines both have two shots that are given three weeks apart (Pfizer) or four weeks apart (Moderna). The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is one shot.
- All three vaccines are **SAFE** and **HIGHLY EFFECTIVE** at **preventing serious illness from COVID-19**.
- While it may seem like the vaccines were developed in record time, the science has been in development for many years and they have gone through all of the steps required for any vaccine to be approved.

SAFETY & EFFICACY

How effective are each of the three vaccines at preventing COVID-19?

- All three vaccines are **highly effective at preventing serious illness** due to COVID-19. Nearly 60,000 people were fully vaccinated in studies of the three vaccines and only one fully vaccinated person was hospitalized with COVID-19.
- So far, research shows that the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines were more than 90% effective in preventing mild COVID-19 illness, while Johnson & Johnson was 66% effective. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine was studied in locations where more contagious COVID-19 variants (“strains”) were circulating, so right now it is not possible to directly compare the effectiveness of the vaccines.
- Because all three vaccines are effective and limited in supply, **doctors and public health experts recommend taking whichever vaccine is offered to you first.**

Are the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines safe? Should I worry that they were developed so quickly?

- Both vaccines were found to be safe and effective in tens of thousands of adults (including Black and Latinx people) who participated in high quality research – the same research that any new vaccine or medicine must undergo before it is approved.
- Both vaccines were reviewed faster than normal. This is because so many people are getting sick and dying of COVID-19 that it is considered a national emergency.

What about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine’s safety?

- Out of nearly 8 million people who have received that vaccine so far, fifteen people have been found to develop unusual blood clots within 5 to 24 days after getting the vaccine.
- These blood clots are very serious and have happened mostly in women between 18 and 50 years old.

- Because these unusual blood clots are extremely rare, and because COVID-19 is very dangerous, medical experts recommend continuing to give the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.
- For more information, please read our FAQ specifically about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Did AMEND staff get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. All AMEND team members received the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it was offered to them.

SIDE EFFECTS & MEDICAL QUESTIONS

What are the possible side effects of the vaccines?

- The most common vaccine side effects are arm soreness, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, and fever. These side effects are more common after the second dose of the vaccine (for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines) and – if they occur – should stop within 2 days.
- These symptoms are **normal** and they are a sign that your body is building protection against the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Among the millions of people who have received COVID-19 vaccines, a very small number of people have experienced severe allergic reactions. If you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine or other substance, you should tell the health care professionals giving the vaccine so they can make sure that giving you the vaccine is safe.

Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccines?

- No. Because of how the vaccines work, **it is impossible to get COVID-19 from the vaccines.** The vaccines also cannot make you test positive for COVID-19.
- Even if you have been vaccinated, if you have a cough, fever, or other symptoms, then there is a chance you could have COVID-19, and you should ask to speak to medical staff right away.

I have diabetes and high blood pressure. Is it safe to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- Yes. It is safe for people with diabetes and high blood pressure to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Only people who have had allergies to ingredients of the COVID-19 vaccine in the past should potentially not receive the vaccine – if this is the case for you, ask your doctor!
- None of the vaccines contain eggs, gelatin, latex or any preservatives.

If I already had COVID-19, do I need to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to you even if you already had COVID-19.
- Research shows that COVID-19 vaccination is safe for people who have already had COVID-19.
- Right now, research shows that reinfection with the virus that causes COVID-19 is very rare in the first few months after you first get sick with COVID-19. This is why some health systems are first giving the vaccine to people who have not had COVID-19 until the vaccine supply is better.
- You should not get the vaccine if you are currently sick with COVID-19.

AFTER VACCINATION

Do I need to keep wearing a mask after I receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. Unfortunately, even people who have had the COVID-19 vaccine may be able to get infected, and although the vaccine protects them from getting seriously sick, they may spread COVID-19 to others. (We do not think this is common but we need more information about this.) Until the majority of all people have been vaccinated against COVID-19, everyone needs to continue wearing masks, practicing physical distancing, and frequently washing their hands.

I got the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. How do I know if I have one of these unusual blood clots related to the vaccine?

If you received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine within the last 28 days and have a bad headache, difficulty breathing, leg swelling, or abdominal pain, you could have an unusual blood clot related to the vaccine, and should contact a health care provider immediately. Keep in mind that these blood clots are extremely rare. Experts estimate there is about 1 case of unusual blood clots for every 500,000 people who get the vaccine.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINES

I heard that some of the officers, health care staff, or the warden at my facility are refusing to get the vaccine. If they aren't getting it, why should I?

There are many reasons that people don't get the vaccine. These include a lack of knowledge about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines, a lack of understanding about COVID-19 itself, mistrust of the medical system, and more. We encourage you to empower yourself by learning as much as you can about the COVID-19 vaccine, and make your own decision about getting the vaccine based on facts, and regardless of what other people are doing.

Should I even bother getting this vaccine given all the mutant "variant forms" of COVID-19?

Yes. So far, research suggests that all three vaccines in the US continue to provide protection against the most common COVID-19 variants. The vaccines are **very good at preventing people from getting seriously sick** (meaning so sick that they have to be hospitalized) from COVID-19. Scientists are still studying the effect that COVID-19 variants have on how well the vaccines work.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine harm my fertility?

No. There is no evidence that the vaccine affects the fertility of men or women. There is also no evidence of infertility caused by the COVID-19 virus among the many millions of men and women who have recovered from COVID-19.

The Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are mRNA vaccines. Does that mean they change your DNA (also called your genetic code)?

- The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines both use "messenger RNA" (also called mRNA) to teach the cells in your body to recognize the outside part of the virus that causes COVID-19. That way, if you are exposed to the virus, your immune system will stop it from making you sick.
- The COVID-19 vaccine **does not change your DNA**. mRNA cannot combine with your DNA.

MORE RESOURCES

Get more information about COVID-19 vaccines at these trusted sites:

<https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvncqnojjDU>

If you have more questions we should answer on the next version of this FAQ, email us at info@amend.us or write to AMEND, 490 Illinois St, Floor 8, UCSF Box 1265, San Francisco, CA 94143.

References

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

State of California COVID-19 Vaccine Information Center <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>

UCSF COVID-19 Vaccine Information Hub <https://coronavirus.ucsf.edu/vaccines>