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## Healthy Insights

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September 2021

### The 411 on COVID-19 Vaccines

Working together, researchers, pharmaceutical companies, and government have saved millions of lives using vaccines that have proven to be safe and highly effective in controlling the spread of coronavirus, reducing the seriousness of illness, and decreasing the number of hospitalizations and deaths among vaccinated people.

Some people have questions about the vaccines. Medical science is continually evolving, and new evidence advances our understanding of both the virus and vaccines. Clare Bradley, MD, MPH, IPRO's Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, recently answered a few common questions on COVID-19 vaccine safety and effectiveness. You are encouraged to discuss your individual concerns with your own doctor, who will be able to provide the most appropriate advice based on your medical history.

#### **Q: Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?**

**A:** COVID-19 vaccines are not only safe, but they have been shown to be highly effective in protecting individuals from the most serious consequences of COVID-19 infection, including hospitalization and death. More than 357 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in the United States alone since December 2020. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is continuing to monitor the vaccines for



safety and effectiveness. In fact, the current monitoring system is the most intensive effort of its kind in US history.

#### **Q: Who should receive a COVID-19 vaccine?**

**A:** The FDA has recommended COVID-19 vaccination for all healthy adults and children 12 and over. Achieving widespread vaccination is an important step toward individual and herd immunity. Herd immunity means that enough people in the community have immunity to the virus (either because they have been vaccinated or have had the virus) to significantly minimize virus transmission.

On an individual level, older adults are among those at highest risk for serious complications from COVID-19. For this reason, it is extremely important for their own well-being that adults 65 and over are fully vaccinated.

#### **Q: I'm hearing a lot about booster shots. Who needs a booster shot, and why?**

**A:** As of this moment, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends booster shots only for individuals for whom the

initial doses of vaccine may not have triggered an adequate immune response. This includes people who are immunocompromised due to current cancer treatment, being on medication following an organ transplantation, having an immune deficiency due to a medical condition like HIV infection, or taking medications such as corticosteroids that may suppress the immune system.

There is some early evidence suggesting that the immune response triggered by the first doses of mRNA vaccines may begin to wane after a period of time. If this is proven to be the case, the CDC may begin to recommend booster shots for other high-risk groups. I suggest monitoring the CDC website and speaking with your personal physician if you have specific questions about whether you need a booster shot.

**Q: Were these vaccines adequately studied before being released?**

**A:** The science on which these vaccines are based has been in existence for a long time. We have been using vaccines to protect us against infectious diseases for more than 100 years. The mRNA technology used in two of the most effective COVID-19 vaccines has been studied and tested by researchers for decades. Although the timeline for testing was accelerated, these vaccines underwent rigorous clinical trials involving tens of thousands of participants. They had to meet the FDA's standards for safety, effectiveness, and manufacturing quality before being approved for use under the agency's emergency use authorization (EUA). The FDA recently granted full approval to the Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine.



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**Q: What are the side effects of the vaccine?**

**A:** Many people report no side effects, or very mild side effects. Some people experience symptoms that include swelling or pain at the injection site, fever, headache, nausea, fatigue, or chills. Side effects are usually mild and disappear after a day or two.

**Q: What about long-term side effects?**

**A:** Long-term side effects from any vaccines are extremely rare. The FDA required all of the COVID-19 vaccines to be monitored for at least eight weeks after administration, and no long-term side effects were observed.

**Q: What if I've had an allergic reaction to a previous vaccine?**

**A:** In rare cases, individuals may have a severe allergic reaction to the ingredients in a vaccine. Speak with your doctor if this has happened to you in the past or you have specific concerns about whether it is safe for you to receive the vaccine given your specific medical history.

For additional information and updates as they become available, visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

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**Source**

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

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*IPRO Healthy Insights* is authored by Dr. Clare Bradley, IPRO's Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer, a nationally recognized public health advocate.

IPRO is a non-profit organization that works with government agencies, providers and patients to measure and improve healthcare for all. For over 35 years we've made creative use of clinical expertise, emerging technology and data solutions to make the healthcare system work better.