

HOW THE COVID-19 VACCINES WORK

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COVID-19 vaccines protect you from getting sick

Local, regional, and national health experts recommend taking a vaccine against COVID-19. Right now, there are 2 vaccines approved in the U.S. for adults: Pfizer and Moderna. Both of these vaccines require 2 doses to be most effective. **95% of people who get 2 doses are protected from getting sick with COVID-19.**

It's normal to have more than one vaccine to fight the same virus. Each of these vaccines has been proven to be safe and effective.

Medical experts are still learning how long the vaccines protect you and if they stop you from spreading COVID-19. It will take some time before everyone who wants a vaccine will be able to get it. **Continue to wash your hands, wear a mask, watch your distance, and keep gatherings small and brief, even if you receive a vaccine.**

What they do

- **They teach your body how to recognize and fight the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.**
- They contain messenger RNA (mRNA).
- mRNA is like an instruction manual. It teaches your body how to make a harmless protein that looks like a protein on this coronavirus. Your body responds to the protein and creates disease-fighting cells and antibodies that can recognize and fight this coronavirus.
- **If your body sees this coronavirus in the future, it is ready to protect you.**

What they don't do

- They **do not** contain coronavirus and can't give you COVID-19.
- They **do not** change your DNA or genetic material. They **do not** go into the nucleus of your cells — the place where DNA lives.

What's in the COVID-19 vaccines?

The [Pfizer](#) and [Moderna](#) vaccines have mRNA and ingredients to help mRNA work in your body: fats, potassium, organic compounds to protect mRNA from too much acid, salt, and sugar.

The vaccines **do not** contain pork products, eggs, latex, or chemicals to preserve the vaccine.



Who can get these vaccines?

- Adults 16 years and older (Pfizer)
- Adults 18 years and older (Moderna)
- Talk with your doctor or clinic if you:
 - Are pregnant or breastfeeding, or
 - Have any serious allergies

Scientists are working on a vaccine for kids and teens under 16.



Side effects

Many people experience mild side effects after getting the vaccine. This is a sign that your body is doing what it is supposed to do: building protection against the disease.

- Common side effects include soreness or redness where you got the vaccine, a headache, tiredness, and/or low fever (less than 100.4). These symptoms are more common after the second dose.
- These symptoms usually go away on their own within a few days. If they don't, call your doctor or clinic.

It is rare, but some people have had a severe allergic reaction. All of these people received medical help right away.

- Everyone who gets these vaccines must wait for at least 15 minutes afterwards, so medical staff can help them if they have a reaction.
- If you've had a severe allergic reaction in the past, talk with your doctor or clinic.

Support is available if you have questions or mixed feelings

You may feel hopeful that vaccines will make it possible for us to be around those we care about again. You may feel nervous. If you are a person of color, you may be wondering if you can trust vaccines from a medical system that has broken trust with your community before. Medical racism in the past and present is real. It's understandable to have concerns. **Learn more and get support:**

- Talk with your doctor or clinic. If you don't have a doctor, call 2-1-1 or Multnomah County Primary Care Clinics: 503-988-5558 | multco.us/health/primary-care-clinics
- Call the Oregon Statewide Racial Equity Support Line if you've been mentally and emotionally impacted by racism: 503-575-3764 | linesforlife.org/racial-equity-support-line
- Call the Oregon Statewide Safe + Strong Helpline for emotional support and resource referral. You don't need to be in crisis. 1-800-923-HELP (4357) | linesforlife.org/obhsl
- Visit multco.us/covid-vaccine for more information.