

# Information about COVID Vaccines from the Health Advisory Team at First Lutheran Church

We strongly recommend that all eligible persons get a COVID vaccine when it becomes available.

## What is an mRNA vaccine and how does it work?

Most vaccines (or immunizations) work by injecting a weakened form of a disease bacteria or virus into your body. This is usually done with a shot in the arm. Your body detects this and makes antibodies to fight them. Those protective antibodies then stay in your body for a long time. In many cases, they stay for the rest of your life like in measles vaccine.

A messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) vaccine is a different kind of vaccine. It works by giving your cells instructions that tell them to make a special protein called a “spike protein.” Your body’s immune cells respond to this spike protein just like they would to a weakened disease germ from a regular vaccine. They make antibodies to fight it. The spike protein instructions in the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine help your body make antibodies that prevent the virus that causes COVID-19 from entering your cells and causing disease. This keeps you from getting sick.

The instructions from the mRNA vaccine don’t interact with your DNA in any way. In fact, once the “instructions” for the antibodies are copied, your body quickly breaks down the mRNA and removes it from your system. mRNA from the vaccine cannot enter the nucleus of a cell where the DNA is stored and therefore these vaccines cannot alter your DNA.

## Can an mRNA vaccine cause COVID-19?

No. The mRNA vaccine doesn’t actually contain the virus that causes COVID-19 and can’t cause disease.

## Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Clinical trials for both of the current vaccines showed that they were about 95% effective at preventing COVID-19. By getting vaccinated, you are reducing your risk of disease, hospitalization, severe complications, and even death. You are also helping prevent the health care system from being even more overwhelmed.

## How much does it cost to get the vaccine?

The federal government is providing the COVID-19 vaccine to the American public free of charge. This includes people who have insurance, including Medicare, Medicare Advantage, group or individual health insurance plans, and high-deductible health plans. It also includes people who don’t have health insurance.

## How many doses are needed?

Both vaccines that are in place now require 2 doses or shots that are scheduled 3-4 weeks apart, depending on which vaccine you receive. Even though the vaccines are similar, you should get the same vaccine both times.

Other vaccines are in the pipeline and could be approved shortly. Some of these do not need two doses and they are different than mRNA vaccines.

## **What are the side effects of the vaccine?**

The mRNA vaccine can cause mild symptoms in some people. This happens because the spike protein instructions tell the immune cells to make antibodies. The most common reactions to the vaccine are pain at the injection site, fever, fatigue, headache, and muscle aches. About 50% of people will have some sort of side effect. It seems that younger people may have more side effects than older people. For some the second shot caused more of these reactions. These side effects can occur with many other vaccines, including the flu shot. They are a sign that the body is responding the way it should to a vaccine. They are NOT a sign that something is wrong in almost all cases. If symptoms persist beyond 24 hours then contact your healthcare professional.

There have been a small number of people who had a severe allergic reaction to the vaccine, but this is extremely rare, and again most people will not have any issues. You will be asked about any history of reactions to vaccines or other injections just to be safe.

## **Do I still need to wear a mask and physically distance if I get the vaccine?**

Yes! The vaccine protects you from getting sick by keeping the COVID virus from entering your cells and causing COVID-19.

Everyone will still need to wear a mask and practice physical distancing until enough people have been vaccinated and developed immunity. This may not be until mid to late 2021. Even then, more data will be needed to see how long immunity lasts. It is possible that more rounds of COVID-19 vaccination may be needed.

## **Should I get the vaccine if I've already had COVID-19?**

Yes, as long as you are not currently sick. We know that natural immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19 decreases over time. There's not enough information from the COVID-19 vaccine studies to show how immunity from the vaccine compares to natural immunity. It's likely the vaccine will boost your immunity and keep you protected longer.

## **How do I report side effects after getting the vaccine?**

The CDC will also be using a new smartphone-based tool called v-safe to send text messages to encourage people to report any side effects. Information on v-safe will be given to everyone who gets the COVID-19 vaccine. You may also get a card that tells you which vaccine and dose you were given and provides other information about the vaccine. You must opt in to get v-safe text messages on your smartphone.

## **Additional information that is reputable and accurate**

Look to <https://www.cdc.gov/> and [www.mn.gov/covid19/](http://www.mn.gov/covid19/) Our State Department of Health