COVID-19 VACCINE FAQs

Being vaccinated is one of many steps you can take to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. Even after you get the vaccine, you should continue to wash your hands often, stay home when sick, and wear a mask as indicated.

What are the benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

- All COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States have been shown to be effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 infection.
- COVID-19 vaccine also prevents you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19.
- Vaccinated persons are not required to quarantine after close contact with a person who has COVID-19 infection, unless they also have symptoms of illness.

How does COVID-19 vaccination protect me from getting sick with COVID-19?

- COVID-19 vaccination works by teaching your immune system how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19, and this protects you from getting sick with COVID-19.

How old do I need to be to get the vaccine?

- Everyone 6 months of age and older is now eligible to get a COVID-19 vaccination.

How can I sign up or sign my child up for a COVID-19 vaccine?

- There are several ways you can find a vaccination provider near you:
  - If you live or work in Baltimore County, go to the Baltimore County COVID-19 vaccine website.
  - If you do not live or work in Baltimore County, check your home county health department website.
  - Contact your community hospital or pharmacy provider. Find an updated list of providers and register for an appointment near you at COVID-19 Vaccinations in Maryland.

If I already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to be vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine?

- Yes, CDC recommends vaccination for persons who have been infected.
- Vaccination reduces the risk of a re-infection with COVID-19 and severe complications.
As an employee or student of BCPS, is it mandatory that I receive the COVID-19 Vaccine?

- Employees, students, and volunteers of BCPS are not required to be vaccinated.

Does it matter which COVID-19 vaccine I get, and do I have a choice about which vaccine I receive?

- Three COVID-19 vaccines are used in the US. The mRNA vaccines, Pfizer and Moderna, are preferred.
  - Pfizer and Moderna vaccines may be given to anyone 6 months of age and older
- Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen (J & J) vaccine may be indicated in some situations:
  - For adults who had a severe reaction after an mRNA vaccine dose
  - For adults who have a severe allergy to an ingredient of Pfizer or Moderna’s vaccines
  - For adults who are not able to get Pfizer or Moderna and would not be able to be vaccinated
  - For adults who want to get the J & J vaccine despite the safety concerns.

How many shots of COVID-19 vaccine will be needed?

- To be considered fully vaccinated, you should have received all doses of the primary series.
  - The J & J vaccine requires one shot for the primary series.
  - The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two* shots, spaced 3 to 8 weeks apart.
    - The first shot gets your body ready. The second shot is given at least three weeks later to make sure you have full protection. Be sure to follow instructions given to schedule your second shot.
    - *Children 6 months to 4 years receiving the Pfizer vaccine will receive a third dose at least 8 weeks after the second dose.
- It takes time for your body to build protection after any vaccination. You should allow 2 weeks after your final COVID-19 vaccine for maximum protection.
- Fully vaccinated is not the same as fully protected. Booster doses are recommended as below:
  - Persons who received the J & J vaccine and who are 18 years and older SHOULD receive a booster shot at least 2 months after receiving their first dose.
  - All persons who received the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines SHOULD receive a booster shot at least 5 months after their second dose.
  - All people 50 years and older and people 12 years and older that are moderately or severely immunocompromised should receive a second booster.
Are booster shots the same as the original shots?

- Yes, the booster shots are the same formulation.
- The Moderna booster shot is half the dose of the vaccine that people get for the initial series.

Which booster shot should you get?

- As noted above, the mRNA vaccines are preferred.
- You do not need to get the same mRNA vaccine as a booster.

Why do we need booster shots?

- Recent studies have shown that the initial vaccine series continues to protect against severe disease; however, over time it has become less effective at preventing infection or milder illness.
- The lower effectiveness is most likely caused by a natural decline in immunity over time (which occurs with many vaccines) combined with the greater infectiousness of emerging variants.
- The emergence of variants emphasizes the need to boost immunity.

How do I know the vaccine is safe?

- The U.S. vaccine safety system makes sure all vaccines are as safe as possible.
- All of the COVID-19 vaccines that are being used have gone through the same safety tests and meet the same standards as any other vaccines produced through the years.
- A system in place across the entire country allows the CDC to watch for safety issues and make sure the vaccines stay safe.
- This safety monitoring system helped identify a rare side effect that is possibly caused by the J & J vaccine.
  - This side effect is very rare. It occurs about one time in every 3.83 million doses of J & J vaccine.
  - The side effect involves blood clots and low platelets. This side effect has resulted in deaths.
  - Consequently, J & J vaccine is offered only after warning persons of this very rare, but possible complication.
- If you have specific concerns about COVID-19 vaccine, reach out to your regular medical provider to discuss.

Can a COVID-19 vaccine make me sick with COVID-19?

- No, none of the COVID-19 vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19.
What should I expect after getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

- Pain and swelling at the injection site are common side effects.
- You may also experience fever, chills, tiredness, muscle and joint aches, and headache. These reactions mean the vaccine is working to help teach your body how to fight COVID-19 if you are exposed. For most people, these side effects will not last longer than a day or two. Having these types of side effects does NOT mean that you have COVID-19.
- It is advised that you use your arm after receiving the vaccine and drink plenty of fluids.
- Side effects after booster doses are essentially the same as the side effects from the initial vaccine series.

After getting a COVID-19 vaccine, will I test positive for COVID-19 on a viral test?

- None of the COVID-19 vaccines currently being administered cause you to test positive on viral tests, which are used to see if you have a current infection.

Can I stop wearing a mask after I have been vaccinated?

- Masks will be required:
  - For individuals who return to school/work under a shortened quarantine option after a COVID-19 diagnosis or exposure (masks must be worn at school until 10 days have passed since the beginning of symptoms or last date of exposure).
  - For individuals with COVID-19 symptoms who are being seen by the nurse in health suites.
- Masks are optional for all other staff, students, and visitors inside of BCPS schools, offices, and buses.
- People should consider wearing a mask in indoor public spaces if:
  - community transmission is moderate or high.
  - they are immunocompromised.
  - a household member is immunocompromised or unvaccinated.
  - they are in a crowded area where it is difficult to distance themselves from others.

Can I still get COVID-19 after I have been vaccinated?

- While the vaccines are very effective, it is still possible to become infected with COVID-19 after being vaccinated. Vaccinated people typically have milder symptoms when infected with COVID-19.
- If you are vaccinated and develop symptoms of COVID-19, you should stay home and be evaluated by a health care provider to see if testing is recommended.
Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Key Things to Know about COVID-19 Vaccines
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – About Variants of the Virus that Causes COVID-19
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – COVID-19 Vaccine and Booster Shots
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People