

# Five things to know about the 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccines

... from Premera Blue Cross



On Tuesday, September 12, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention approved two COVID-19 mRNA vaccines, from Pfizer and Moderna, for those six months and older, and the Novavax vaccine for those ages 12 and older.

With cold and flu season approaching, it's important to stay up to date with vaccines as exposure to viruses will be more likely in the coming months. To help make that process easy, we've answered some common questions about COVID vaccines below.

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## **What's the difference between an mRNA vaccine and other types of vaccines?<sup>1</sup>**

The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines use mRNA, which causes cells to create antibodies to fight the infection or virus. These vaccines work a different way than traditional vaccines, such as the Novavax vaccine, which contain a weakened or dead bacteria or virus. With an mRNA vaccine, you aren't exposed to the virus, nor can you get the virus from this type of vaccine.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.hhs.gov/immunization/basics/types/index.html](https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/basics/types/index.html)

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**Are the updated COVID vaccines safe and effective?**

Yes, COVID mRNA vaccines have been thoroughly tested and the results studied to ensure they are safe. The updated Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are based on the booster doses that were available last fall. The effectiveness of these vaccines against mild, moderate, and severe cases of COVID is 90%.

The Novavax vaccine is also incredibly safe and is considered a traditional vaccine. Its components are like those used in vaccines for shingles, DTaP, and others. For more information about the Novavax vaccine, [this FDA fact sheet](#) is a great resource.

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**Can I get sick from the vaccine?**

Because the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use mRNA, they contain no weakened or dead virus and cannot make you sick with COVID although you may feel some flu-like symptoms that last for a few hours. Vaccines can take one to two weeks to become fully effective. However, if you were exposed to the virus before receiving your shot, or shortly after, you may still get sick.

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**Can I get the flu and the COVID vaccines at the same time?**

Yes. Clinical data has shown that getting COVID, flu, and/or RSV vaccines together for those who are eligible is safe and effective. People are encouraged to talk with their provider to determine whether they should receive multiple vaccines at once.

Getting multiple vaccines at once saves time for both patients and providers by avoiding the need to schedule multiple appointments. Overall, it is recommended that anyone who is eligible should receive all applicable respiratory disease vaccines this fall for the best protection.

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**Why is there a new COVID vaccine?**

The virus that causes COVID continues to change. For example, researchers are currently learning more about a newer variant called BA.2.86. That's why it's important to use all the best tools we have to fight COVID. The updated 2023-2024 COVID vaccines target the Omicron subvariant XBB.1.5 and are our best defense against COVID this year.