

Questions (and Answers) About Booster Shots for COVID-19 Vaccines



What is the difference between an additional primary shot and a booster shot of a [COVID-19 vaccine](#)?

An additional primary shot is a third full dose of COVID-19 vaccine that is given 28 days after someone receives the standard two doses of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. Only people who are moderately or severely immunocompromised should get an additional primary shot, and when they do, it should always be the same brand of the vaccine already received.

Booster shots, on the other hand, can be given to anyone age 12+ who has received the standard two-dose primary shots. The time frame for getting a booster depends on the type of COVID-19 shots originally received.

Who needs an additional [primary shot of COVID-19 vaccine](#)?

In general, additional shots are recommended for people with moderately or severely weakened immune systems. Additional primary shots are not recommended for people whose primary vaccine was Johnson & Johnson/Janssen.

If you think you need an additional primary shot, talk to your healthcare provider.

Who needs a booster [COVID-19 vaccine](#)?

Everyone 12+ who received a full, two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series should now get a booster shot.

The time frame for when to get this [shot](#) is different depending on which type of COVID-19 vaccine you originally received. Pfizer-BioNTech

or Moderna (mRNA COVID-19 vaccines) are preferred for booster shots in most situations.

If I'm eligible for a [COVID-19 vaccine booster](#), which type of vaccine should I [receive](#)?

If you are 18 years old or older, the CDC recommendations are flexible about which vaccine you receive as a booster. The vaccine you get as a booster does not need to be the same brand as the COVID-19 vaccine you received originally if you are in this age group. However, Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna (mRNA COVID-19 vaccines) are preferred in most situations.

Teens ages 12 to 17 who received the first and second Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine doses can and should receive a booster of the same Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine five months after the primary doses.

Do I need a [COVID-19 vaccine booster shot to protect me from COVID-19](#)?

Some studies show that the ability of your primary, two-dose vaccine to protect you from **initial infection and milder COVID-19 symptoms** may decrease over time. However, the original vaccine is still working to keep you safe from severe COVID-19, hospitalization, and death from the disease. A booster shot is likely to give you even better protection as more variants, like omicron, emerge.

Why are booster shots necessary if the COVID-19 vaccine is working like it should?

COVID-19 vaccines work well to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Clinical studies show that the ability of COVID-19 vaccines to protect you from initial infection and milder symptoms may decrease over time. This is something that happens with vaccines for many other illnesses, too. Studies have shown that getting a COVID-19 booster shot greatly increases your protection from a symptomatic COVID-19 infection.

Why do some people who've been fully vaccinated still get sick with COVID-19?

Some people who are fully vaccinated will still get COVID-19 because no vaccines are 100% effective at preventing infection. Breakthrough infections are normal and expected. Even when fully vaccinated people develop symptoms, they are usually less severe, and the person is less likely to be hospitalized or die than if they were unvaccinated. This is because COVID-19 vaccines are still doing a very good job at preventing serious illness and death.

Find more shareable COVID-19 resources at <https://covid19community.nih.gov>

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