

Empowered and Informed Decision Making for the COVID-19 Vaccine: A Guide for Self-Advocates

Making a personal decision about whether to or not to get the COVID-19 vaccine can be difficult. Having accurate information is important for you to make the best decision for yourself. This resource will present factual and reliable answers to your most frequently asked questions.

The vaccines were developed so fast. Are they really safe?

Over 30 years of research led to the vaccines. Tens of thousands of individuals participated in the clinical trials. Tens of millions of people have received the vaccine. The data and their personal experiences show the vaccines are safe and effective.

How do we know the vaccines will not cause health problems later?

If vaccines are going to cause side effects, it usually happens relatively quickly. People who have received the vaccines continue to be followed for side effects. The few problems that have happened would not cause vaccinations to stop. The risk of these side effects is far less than the benefits of the vaccine.

Does emergency use authorization mean we do not know enough about the vaccines yet?

No. The standards for emergency use authorization and full approval are almost the same. The only difference is that for full approval, there needs to be more time to watch for long-term benefits and side effects. Scientists and doctors will continue to watch people who got the vaccines. The Pfizer vaccine is in the process of being considered for full approval.

If I already had COVID, do I still need to get vaccinated?

Yes. If you had COVID-19, your immune response may not last long. The vaccines produce a stronger, more consistent, and longer immune response.

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How are the three vaccines different?

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use mRNA technology. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine uses an inactivated virus. All three vaccines cause your cells to produce copies of the spike protein on the surface of the coronavirus. Your immune system learns to recognize the spike protein and can fight off the actual virus so you do not get sick. The vaccines do not include a whole coronavirus and cannot make you sick from COVID.

Does mRNA change or alter my DNA?

mRNA cannot change your DNA. In your cells, mRNA is regularly produced from DNA to allow your cells to work. It does not work the other way around.

Is one vaccine safer and more effective than the others?

All of the vaccines are safe and effective. The risks from the vaccines are far less than the risks of getting sick from COVID. There have been rare cases of blood clots that may be associated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has the advantage of needing only one shot. You need two shots for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

Will the COVID vaccines affect my ability to have children?

There is no evidence the vaccines affect your ability to have children. Millions of young adults have been vaccinated. There has been no evidence of fertility issues. Thousands of pregnant women have also been vaccinated. Pregnant women are at higher risk for getting severe COVID symptoms. Vaccinated pregnant women have protected themselves and passed that immunity onto their infants. Women who are breastfeeding have also been safely vaccinated. They have passed their immunity to their baby through breast milk.

This resource was developed by ASERT, in collaboration with Arvind Venkat, MD- Allegheny Health Network, and Joann Migyanka, DEd- Indiana University of Pennsylvania.