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COVID-19 Vaccines and Treatments Information and Resources

The PFF Medical Team is monitoring the development of vaccines and treatments for COVID-19.

Three vaccines have been approved for Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) by the FDA. Of these three vaccines, the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, now marketed as Comirnaty, has recently received full approval from the FDA for use in individuals 16 years of age and older and remains available for ages 5-15 under EUA.

In accordance with Recommendations issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation strongly encourages vaccination for COVID-19, as the benefits far outweigh the risks. To ensure that you are not part of the limited population for whom vaccination is not recommended at this time, reach out to your primary care physician and pulmonologist for more information.

COVID-19 variants have recently emerged around the world and in the U.S., and some of these strains of the virus are known to spread more easily. This may mean that for those who are exposed to these variants, immunity from a previous COVID-19 infection or from a COVID-19 vaccination may not be as effective at preventing infection, though more research needs to be done to fully understand the impact of the new COVID-19 variants.

The Delta and Omicron Variant

The Delta variant has been the predominant variant of the virus in the U.S. throughout most of 2021 and is present in all 50 states. It is more infectious and is leading to higher transmissibility than earlier forms of Sars-CoV2, the virus that causes COVID-19, even in some vaccinated individuals.

Scientists have recently discovered and are studying the Omicron variant. The World Health Organization and CDC have classified Omicron as a variant of concern, and it is rapidly becoming the predominant COVID-19 strain in the U.S. The Omicron variant is more transmissible than the Delta variant. Evidence suggests that while vaccines have reduced activity against the Omicron variant, a booster vaccine dose improves protection against infection.

As a result, the CDC released updated guidance on the need for COVID-19 vaccination and a recommendation for everyone in areas of high transmission to wear a mask in public places, even if they are fully vaccinated.

People who are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine should proceed with vaccination, as the currently authorized vaccines are highly effective in reducing the severity and spread of disease. Strategies that are known to reduce the spread of infection, such as wearing a mask, social distancing, and frequent hand washing, remain crucial in limiting the spread of COVID-19, especially as new variants of the disease are discovered.

The CDC recommends using a self-test before gathering indoors with others, regardless of vaccination status, even if you do not have symptoms and have not been exposed to anyone with COVID-19. Self-testing is especially important before meeting with unvaccinated children, older individuals, those who are immunocompromised, or individuals at risk of severe disease.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued emergency use authorization of AstraZeneca's long-acting monoclonal antibody therapy (Evusheld) to help protect certain immunocompromised individuals from COVID-19 infection.

Third Dose for Immunocompromised Individuals

Lung transplant recipients and people taking medications that suppress their immune system may have a lower immune response to the COVID-19 vaccine according to a recent study by Johns Hopkins University. The study suggests that a substantial proportion of transplant recipients likely remain at risk for COVID-19 after 2 doses of mRNA vaccine.

Individuals who have received a lung transplant, their loved ones, and people with compromised immune systems should get vaccinated and continue to take precautions to prevent infection from COVID-19. To provide additional protection for transplant recipients and those with a compromised immune system, the CDC recommends an additional dose of the Moderna or Pfizer BioNTech mRNA COVID-19 vaccine be given no fewer than 28 days after the initial two doses.

Boosters

The CDC recommends boosters for all three available COVID-19 vaccines in the U.S.

Everyone ages 16 years and older who received a Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at 6 months or more after their initial series should get a booster. Those who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, are age 18 and older, and have been vaccinated for two or more months should also get a booster dose.

Individuals may choose which vaccine they receive as a booster dose. There may be reasons for using the same brand or a different one in individual cases, so questions should be directed to your physician.

You can access up-to-date information about vaccine types, authorized and recommended vaccines, and vaccines in Phase 3 clinical trials on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, which will be updated as additional information is available. You can access other general information about vaccines for COVID-19 on the CDC's website here.

To find out where vaccines are available in your area, contact your physician, your healthcare facility, or your state department of public health. You can also use the Vaccine Finder tool to find additional locations in your community that have reported to the CDC that they offer the COVID-19 vaccine.

According to the CDC, vaccine doses supplied for distribution using U.S. taxpayer dollars must be provided to the public at no cost. However, vaccination providers may charge a fee for administering the vaccine. A vaccine recipient's private insurance plan or public health plan may offer reimbursement for the vaccination provider's administration fee. If a vaccine recipient is uninsured, the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund should be able to assist with reimbursement.

In addition to vaccines approved to prevent coronavirus infection, there are a number of treatments for COVID-19 that have received a designation of Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) by the FDA. When there are no adequate, approved, or available alternatives to diagnose, treat, or prevent serious or life-threatening diseases or conditions, the FDA Commissioner may grant EUA status to a drug or device to allow patients to access medical products that are not yet approved, or whose use has only been approved to treat other conditions. You can learn more about EUAs and access information about all of the drugs and devices that currently have EUA status for the treatment of COVID-19 on the FDA website.