

COVID-19 Vaccine Patient FAQ

As Northwestern Medicine begins to schedule patients for the COVID-19 vaccine, patients will have many questions. The following information is on the [Northwestern Medicine COVID-19 Vaccination Plan](#) page on [nm.org](#).

Eligibility and Timing for Vaccination

Now that the COVID-19 vaccine is approved for use, when will patients and the general public begin receiving it?

Northwestern Medicine is now sending invitations to eligible patients to schedule vaccination. Invitations are being sent in phases to help ensure we can accommodate all patients in a timely and efficient manner. Eligibility is based on criteria established in the [state of Illinois vaccination plan, available here](#). Illinois is now in Phase 1B, which includes front-line essential workers and those age 65 and older. Note that this plan may change quickly at any time.

Who is considered an established Northwestern Medicine patient?

For the purposes of this phase of the vaccination program, a patient is considered established if they have a Northwestern Medicine primary care physician or regularly see a Northwestern Medicine specialist. The patient must have had a visit with their physician within the past 18 months.

Who should and should not get vaccinated?

Vaccination is key to ending the pandemic. If you are eligible, you should consider being vaccinated.

Please reach out to your care provider to confirm you should take the COVID-19 vaccine if you have any of the following medical conditions:

- Allergies
- A fever
- A bleeding disorder or are on a blood thinner
- Are on a medicine that affects your immune system or are immunocompromised
- Are pregnant, plan to become pregnant or are breastfeeding

Learn about the ingredients and more information about both the [Moderna](#) and the [Pfizer-BioNTech](#) vaccine. You also must be old enough to receive the vaccine.

How old do you have to be to get the vaccine?

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is approved for people 16 and older. The Moderna vaccine is approved for people 18 and older.

If I have had COVID-19, should I still get the vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to you even if you have already had COVID-19. However, if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 90 days, you should delay the vaccine at this time. Please wait until at least 90 days after your COVID-19 diagnosis before scheduling vaccination.

What if I just received a flu shot or other vaccine?

If you have received any other type of vaccine in the past 14 days, you cannot receive the COVID-19 vaccine at this time. Please schedule your vaccination after this 14-day period.

Can people with high-risk medical conditions receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, but only if they are over 65. If you have concerns about vaccination based on your specific medical history, please discuss them with your medical provider.

If I'm pregnant or breastfeeding, is it safe for me to get the vaccine?

People who were pregnant or breastfeeding were not included in the first vaccine trials. This is not unusual, as clinical trials don't typically include people who are pregnant or lactating until the vaccine has been shown to be safe in the general population. However, people who are pregnant and become sick with COVID-19 have been shown to have worse outcomes from the illness. Therefore, vaccination may be recommended for people who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Additionally, breastfeeding parents may be vaccinated. The vaccine is not thought to pose a risk to a breastfeeding infant. If you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or breastfeeding, talk to your physician about COVID-19 vaccination.

Where and when can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Northwestern Medicine is identifying and proactively contacting patients who are eligible to schedule COVID-19 vaccination appointments. We are following federal, state and local guidelines throughout this process. Patients are contacted through their preferred communication method: email, text message and/or phone call. You can update your contact information and preferences through the MyNM patient portal at nm.org/mynm.

If you receive a communication from Northwestern Medicine about scheduling, please make your appointment as soon as possible, following the instructions given. This allows us to efficiently use all doses of the COVID-19 vaccine that we receive. You can make an appointment for vaccination at any Northwestern Medicine facility that is available at the time of scheduling.

We will continue to contact established Northwestern Medicine patients and update this page with new information.

How do you schedule COVID-19 vaccination at Northwestern Medicine?

Northwestern Medicine patients who receive an invitation are encouraged to open and use their MyNM account to schedule their vaccination appointment. You can find [instructions to set up a MyNM account here](#). If you do not have a MyNM account, your invitation will include an access code and a link to a website to use for scheduling. Once you enter the access code, you will be able to select the date, time and location of your vaccination appointment. Please note that the access code is for one-time use and is unique to you.

How will I receive the notification?

If you have a MyNM account (formerly known as MyChart), you will receive a notification in your email. If you do not have a MyNM account, we will contact you the same way you receive your appointment reminders — by phone, text message or email.

Can I reschedule my vaccine appointment after I've made it?

You will not be able to reschedule the appointment online. If you need to reschedule, please call 312.694.6600 (TTY: 711).

How do I schedule my second dose of the vaccine?

We will schedule you for your second appointment when you receive your first dose.

What if I have questions about scheduling my COVID-19 vaccine appointment?

If you have questions about scheduling your COVID-19 vaccine appointment once you've received an invitation, please call the COVID-19 Vaccine Hotline at 312.694.6600 (TTY: 711).

If I receive an invitation, can my spouse, other family member or neighbor also get the vaccine?

We are following specific criteria for scheduling established Northwestern Medicine patients based on available vaccine doses. If your spouse or family member meets that criteria, they will receive a separate invitation to schedule. Your invitation is only for you.

Will I receive an invitation if my physician is part of the Northwestern Medicine Physician Network?

Patients who regularly see a physician who is part of the Northwestern Medicine Physician Network (NMPN) are eligible to be invited for a COVID-19 vaccination.

How do I receive the vaccine if I am not a Northwestern Medicine patient?

Many Illinois counties now have information or registration forms for the public to subscribe to vaccination updates, including the following in Chicagoland:

- [City of Chicago](#)
- [Cook County](#)
- [DeKalb County](#)
- [DuPage County](#)
- [Kane County](#)
- [Lake County](#)
- [McHenry County](#)

You can also find a full list of vaccine sites for the [State of Illinois](#).

Federal, state and local governments continue to refine plans for vaccination, including eligibility decisions and availability of doses. At this time, vaccine supply is still limited. Eventually, there will be enough vaccine doses for everyone who chooses to be vaccinated.

Vaccine Development and Safety

What vaccines are approved and available?

Two COVID-19 vaccines have been approved so far in the U.S. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the Moderna vaccine are now being given.

How do mRNA vaccines work?

mRNA stands for *messenger ribonucleic acid*. mRNA vaccines are a new type of vaccine to protect against disease. Instead of putting a weakened or inactive germ into your body like most vaccines, mRNA vaccines teach your cells to make a protein that triggers an immune response inside your body. The immune response produces the antibodies that help protect you from getting sick if the virus enters your body. mRNA vaccines have been held to the same safety standards as all other types of vaccines in the U.S.

How do I know the vaccine development process was safe?

The safety of the COVID-19 vaccines is a top priority for everyone who has helped develop them. All vaccines go through three phases of clinical trials to make sure they are safe and effective. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves all vaccines and closely monitors their use. It collects data on the vaccines' benefits and side effects. So far, reports of severe reactions from the first two COVID-19 vaccines available in the U.S. have been rare.

Are the vaccines effective? Is one better than the other?

Studies have shown that both approved COVID-19 vaccines are very effective at preventing COVID-19 illness. Based on the results of the clinical trials, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was shown to be 95% effective; the Moderna vaccine was 94.1% effective.

Can a COVID-19 vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. None of the approved COVID-19 vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. That means that a COVID-19 vaccine **cannot** give you COVID-19.

What are the common side effects of the vaccines?

Common side effects are similar to those of the flu vaccine. You may have pain, swelling and redness in the arm where you got the shot. You can also have chills, tiredness and headache for a short time. All side effects should stop in a few days. Severe reactions from vaccines given to date have been rare. Having side effects **does not** mean you have COVID-19. In fact, side effects are often a sign that the vaccine is working.

I see a lot of information on my social media channels about the COVID-19 vaccine. Where can I get accurate information?

When you see vaccine information, it's a good idea to check that the information is from a credible source and is up-to-date. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) is a good place to find [that information](#). The CDC vaccine information is written and approved by physicians, researchers, epidemiologists and other experts. Here are some other websites where you can get information:

- [Northwestern Medicine COVID-19 Resource Center](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Website](#)
- [Illinois Department of Public Health COVID-19 Website](#)

- [Chicago Department of Public Health COVID-19 Website](#)
- [Illinois Health and Hospital Association COVID-19 Website](#)

Will I have to pay for the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccines were purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars. You do not have to pay for the vaccine itself. Northwestern Medicine may bill your insurance to administer the vaccine, but there will not be an out-of-pocket cost for any patient.