

COVID-19 Update

October 28: CDC Expands Eligibility for Boosters, Workforce Vaccination and Booster Update, CDC Updates Holiday Guidelines

Today's issue features information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about the expansion of booster shot eligibility. It also includes an update on vaccine and booster shot availability for the NM workforce, and updated holiday guidelines from the CDC.

CDC EXPANDS ELIGIBILITY FOR BOOSTERS

On October 21, the CDC expanded its recommendations regarding the administration of COVID-19 vaccine booster shots. They also provided additional guidance on the use of Johnson & Johnson and Moderna vaccines for boosters.

For individuals who received a Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, the following groups are eligible for a booster shot at least six months after their initial series:

- 65 years and older or living in a long-term care setting
- Age 18 years and older with underlying medical conditions
- Age 18 years and older who work or live in high-risk settings (e.g. healthcare)

For the nearly 15 million people who got the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, booster shots are also recommended for everyone 18 and older and who were vaccinated two or more months ago.

There are now booster recommendations for all three available COVID-19 vaccines. Eligible individuals may choose which vaccine they receive as a booster dose. Some people may have a preference for the vaccine type that they originally received, and others may prefer to get a different booster. CDC's recommendations now allow for this type of mix-and-match dosing for booster shots.

Available data demonstrate that all three of the COVID-19 vaccines continue to be highly effective in reducing risk of severe disease, hospitalization and death, even against the widely circulating delta variant. Vaccination remains the best way to protect against infection, reduce spread of the virus and help prevent new variants from emerging.

WORKFORCE VACCINATIONS AND BOOSTER UPDATE

The NM workforce may now get the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine booster and first and second doses, as well as flu shots, at all vaccine clinics across the health system. These clinics were rotating COVID-19 vaccinations and flu vaccinations each week, but now will offer options for both vaccinations at all sites.

Moderna boosters to be offered

For staff members who prefer to get the Moderna COVID-19 booster shot, those will be available only at McHenry Hospital beginning the week of November 1. Staff will be able to make appointments for this booster later this week. Note that only **booster** doses of the Moderna vaccine are being offered. First and second doses of the Moderna vaccine will not be available at this clinic.

If you prefer to get the Moderna booster and cannot travel to McHenry, many retail pharmacies and other community sites are offering the Moderna booster. If you get the booster outside of NM, documentation can be submitted through the immunization upload process on **NM Interactive** (login required) by following the path: NMI > Resources > Safety & Risk > Immunization Doc Upload. Please use this **tip sheet** for additional support.

Pfizer booster appointments

Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine booster appointments continue to be available in NM workforce clinics across the health system. You will need to make an appointment for a booster by clicking **here**.

When making an appointment, choose your preferred location under the location drop-down menu. The location will default to wherever you received your first doses, but you may change that to an alternate location based on where you live or work.

CDC UPDATES HOLIDAY GUIDELINES

The CDC recently updated its recommendations for safer holiday celebrations. Because many generations tend to gather for the holidays, the new guidelines state that the best way to minimize COVID-19 risk, and keep family and friends safer, is to get vaccinated.

General CDC guidelines for holiday celebrations

- Protect those not yet eligible for vaccination, such as young children, by getting yourself and other eligible people around them vaccinated.
- Wear well-fitting masks over your nose and mouth if you are in public indoor settings if you are not fully vaccinated.
- Even those who are fully vaccinated should wear a mask in public indoor settings in communities with substantial to high transmission.
- Gathering outdoors is safer than indoors.
- Avoid crowded, poorly ventilated spaces.
- If you are sick or have symptoms, don't host or attend a gathering.
- Get **tested** if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or have close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

If you are considering traveling for a holiday or event, visit the CDC's **Travel page** for additional guidelines. The CDC still recommends delaying travel unless you are **fully vaccinated**.

The CDC's expanded recommendation for boosters is an important step forward as we work to keep our patients, colleagues and families safe. However, the new guidelines should not replace the critical work of educating those who are unvaccinated about the importance of getting the vaccine. Thank you for your continued collaboration and leadership in providing exceptional care to the patients and communities we serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gary A. Noskin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gary A. Noskin, MD
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