

Q & A

Do the COVID-19 Vaccines Actually Work?

Three COVID-19 vaccines are now being used in the United States. But how are these vaccines different and how are they the same? How effective are they? And should I wait for other vaccines to be available? Here are answers to some common questions you may have.

Q **How are the Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines different from other vaccines and each other?**

A The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use technology called messenger RNA (mRNA) to get the body to protect itself. mRNA is not a live virus and it never gets near your DNA. Instead, it teaches your body how to make a protein that is also found in coronavirus, and then your body learns to fight it. Once your body builds this immunity, the mRNA is broken down and eliminated.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is different. It contains the genetic material of a safe virus (like the kind that causes the common cold). This safe virus cannot replicate and cannot cause disease. Instead, it carries a gene from the coronavirus into human cells. The cells then produce proteins that teach your body how to fight off the coronavirus.

Q **What is the difference between the Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines?**

A There are minor differences between the vaccines:

	Pfizer	Moderna	Johnson & Johnson
Time between doses	3 weeks	4 weeks	No time since only 1 dose
Storage temperature	Special -112°F ultra-cold freezer	Standard household freezer temperature	Standard household refrigerator temperature
Time to use after thawing	Must be used within 5 days	Must be used within 30 days	Does not need to be thawed
Amount of mRNA	30 micrograms	100 micrograms	0 micrograms



Q Is one vaccine better than the other?

A All three vaccines are very effective at preventing COVID-19. That is why you should get whichever vaccine is offered to you.

Q Other vaccines are on the way. Should I wait for them?

A No, do not wait. All three vaccines are authorized for use and very effective. Get whichever one is offered to you first.

Q I hear these vaccines do not use preservatives, live virus or eggs. Is that good or bad?

A Generally speaking, it is good. This is especially true for people who normally cannot get a vaccine because they are allergic to eggs (eggs are often used in the vaccine-making process). The COVID vaccines actually have very few ingredients. That simplicity is a good thing. It means that even people who are immunosuppressed or pregnant can get the vaccine.

Q Should I be worried about how fast these vaccines were developed? We were originally told it would take years.

A You should not be worried. It is true that vaccines often take many years to develop, but that is changing thanks to advances in technology. This is good because the COVID-19 pandemic is a public health crisis that requires fast action. Developing a vaccine quickly was needed to prevent more people from dying.

To speed up the COVID vaccines, some of the clinical trial phases overlapped with each other. Downtime between research studies was also eliminated. That does not mean the trials were unsafe or that any corners were cut. The vaccines still had to go through rigorous clinical trials with tens of thousands of people to make sure they were safe and effective. And a panel of independent experts verified the results before the vaccines were released to the public.

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