

# COVID-19 VACCINE DISCUSSION GUIDE

For Community and Organization Leaders

This guide serves as a tool to help community and organization leaders feel confident in having conversations about the COVID-19 vaccines within faith-based communities, volunteer organizations, educational teams, social groups and other types of groups.

By understanding the basics of vaccines, speaking about your experience and sharing what the science tells us, you can begin a conversation and help others feel comfortable getting vaccinated when it's their turn.

Remember, you do not need to have all the answers. You can direct people who want to learn more to visit UNC Health's vaccine site, [www.YourShot.org](http://www.YourShot.org), or the [NC Division of Health and Human Services' site](#).

## VACCINE TOPICS TO DISCUSS:



1. Why are we talking about the vaccine?
2. Do vaccines work?
3. Are vaccines tested and safe?
4. What are the side effects?
5. When can I get a vaccine?
6. Facts, myths and other concerns



## WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT THE VACCINE?

While researchers, elected officials and healthcare experts have been working hard to ensure people feel informed and confident about the vaccines, sometimes conversations that happen directly within communities are the most effective.



### **Discussion Question:**

What have you heard about the vaccines among your family and friends?  
Are there things you've heard that may be true or false?

Sharing accurate and trusted information is an important way to reduce misinformation and ensure our friends, families and community members have the information they need to stay safe and healthy. We want to be a resource for reliable information and help answer questions you may have.

We want to have a discussion—not a lecture. We want to learn how you and our community feel about the COVID-19 vaccines. We also want to listen to your concerns and hear what gaps in information and barriers to access may exist. Our goal is to help you feel confident in finding the correct information to make the right decision for you and your family.



### **Discussion Question:**

What concerns do you have? Are you interested in learning more?

## DO VACCINES WORK?

The availability of COVID-19 vaccines is a big step forward in helping to beat the virus and return to life before the pandemic. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine can help keep you from becoming seriously ill and help protect your family, your friends and the community.

Most of us have received many vaccines throughout our lives, including those that prevent chickenpox, polio and the flu.



### **Discussion Question:**

Do you feel differently about the COVID-19 vaccines versus other vaccines you may have received? Why?

Some of the COVID-19 vaccines are mRNA vaccines, which is short for messenger RNA. The Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines were the first mRNA vaccines to receive Emergency Use Authorization from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). But mRNA technology in medicine is not new. Scientists have been studying how to use mRNA technology for decades, and these vaccines were thoroughly tested and evaluated.

The Johnson & Johnson shot uses a weakened common cold virus, called an adenovirus, to create a reaction in the body that produces antibodies. Later, if exposed to COVID-19, the immune system remembers how to fight the virus.



# DO VACCINES WORK? (CONT'D)

## All Authorized COVID-19 Vaccines

- **Safe and effective**
- **Nearly 100% effective in preventing COVID-19 hospitalization and death**
- **Most common side effect is soreness in the injection site**

### Pfizer

- Requires 2 shots
- Authorized for age 12 or older
- Protects against new Britain variant of the virus, and lab tests predict that it protects against variants of the virus
- In large clinical trials, 95% effective in preventing people from becoming sick with COVID-19

### Moderna

- Requires 2 shots
- Authorized for age 18 or older
- Protects against new Britain variant of the virus, and lab tests predict that it protects against variants of the virus
- In large clinical trials, 94% effective in preventing people from becoming sick with COVID-19

### Johnson & Johnson

- Requires 1 shot
- Authorized for age 18 or older
- Protects against new Britain variant of the virus and appears to provide some protection against variants from Brazil and South Africa
- In large clinical trials, 66% effective in preventing people from becoming sick with COVID-19



# ARE VACCINES TESTED AND SAFE?

**Yes.** The vaccines are safe, and the standard development process was followed. Although the COVID-19 vaccines were developed quickly, Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) does not mean any corners were cut.

Many vaccine researchers dropped everything to focus on COVID-19 vaccines, and the federal government provided funding for clinical trials, which are research studies that make sure medications and vaccines work and are safe. But no safety review hurdles were skipped. More than 100,000 Americans of all races, ethnicities, genders and health conditions were enrolled in clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccines, including some studies at UNC.



## Discussion Question:

Do you know anyone who participated in a clinical trial? Would you consider participating?



## What about children?

The Pfizer vaccine is authorized for youth ages 12-17. Clinical trials for children are underway by Pfizer and Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson plans to begin testing its vaccine in children and newborns this year.

## UNC Health has been a part of clinical trials for the Moderna and Novavax COVID-19 vaccines.

Pastor Wil Nichols of Victorious Praise Fellowship Church in Durham, North Carolina, is a participant in the Novavax clinical trial. [Hear Pastor Nichols share his experience as a participant in a COVID-19 vaccine study.](#)



# WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

The most common side effect of the COVID-19 vaccine is arm soreness. After receiving a shot, your arm may be sore, red or warm. These symptoms usually go away on their own within a day or two. Other side effects may include a headache, fever, chills or muscle aches, which are more common after receiving the second shot. These side effects are considered normal.

Some people have questions about long-term side effects and effectiveness. We do not know the long-term ability of COVID-19 vaccines to prevent infection at this time. It is possible that you will need additional doses (boosters) of the vaccine in the future, similar to the way the [flu vaccine](#) works. Researchers will continue to follow the vaccine study participants to determine how long the vaccines might be effective.



## **Discussion Question:**

Are there any side effects that are particularly concerning to you?

## **Most patients can receive COVID-19 vaccines safely.**

### **Women Who Are Pregnant or Breastfeeding**

Limited data is available, and trials of certain vaccines are ongoing. Experts recommend the COVID-19 be made available to pregnant women, who may choose to be vaccinated.

### **People with Known Allergies**

Only those who have severe allergies to the components of the COVID-19 vaccines should not receive one. If you have had severe reactions to other vaccines or injectable medications, you can likely get the vaccine but should talk with your doctor first.

Everyone who gets a COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of allergy history, is monitored afterward to make sure he or she does not have a reaction. Everyone is monitored for at least 15 minutes after getting the shot, and if you have a history of severe allergic reactions, you will be monitored for 30 minutes after getting the shot.

### **Patients with Compromised Immune Systems**

Immunocompromised individuals were not included in vaccine clinical trials, so we do not have a recommendation for these groups at this time. Talk to your doctor about what's best for you.

### **Patients with Cancer**

People with cancer are at an increased risk for sickness and death from COVID-19. We recommend patients with cancer, including those who are receiving cancer treatment, be vaccinated as soon as they are eligible. Some patients, like those with a low platelet count or bone marrow transplant patients, may need to wait to get vaccinated and should talk with their care team first.



## FACTS, MYTHS, AND OTHER COMMENTS

Some people are very skeptical of COVID-19 vaccines or frustrated with the process of receiving one. Here is some additional information.

### Facts and Myths

**Fact: The vaccines do not contain a microchip.**

There has been an ongoing myth that the COVID-19 vaccines contain a microchip. This is not true. The only tracker tied to the vaccines is a GPS tracker on the vaccine trays that is there [to ensure the safe delivery](#) of millions of vials of vaccines across the country.

**Fact: vaccines do not cause male or female infertility.**

There is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccine causes infertility in men or women. Severe cases of COVID-19 itself may affect the quality of a man's sperm, and the vaccines help prevent you from catching the virus. With regard to female infertility, there have been rumors that the vaccines affect the placenta. This is false. This is how that myth originated: The vaccines encourage the body to make copies of the spike protein found on the surface of COVID-19, which then causes the body's immune system to fight the virus. Some people have worried that this spike protein also targets a protein in the placenta of pregnant women called syncytin-1. This is not true. They are different proteins, and there is no data suggesting that the antibodies from the COVID-19 vaccines will affect syncytin-1.

**Fact: The mRNA vaccines do not change your DNA.**

Another myth circulating on the internet is that mRNA vaccines change your DNA and therefore could cause cancer. This is false. In fact, the mRNA in the vaccines does not interact with human DNA; it simply teaches the immune system how to recognize the virus.

# FACTS, MYTHS, AND OTHER COMMENTS (CONT'D)

## Facts and Myths

**Q:** **As a Black American, I don't trust UNC Health or the vaccine.**

**A:** Acknowledging the history of medical experimentation on Black Americans in the United States and North Carolina as well as current racial inequity in medicine is necessary to building a foundation of trust with Black communities. Black doctors, scientists and researchers have been a part of the vaccine process nationwide and in North Carolina, including UNC Health, and thousands of Black Americans have already received the vaccines.

**Q:** **I hear some of the vaccines work better than others.**

**A:** The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is equally effective as the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines when it comes to preventing hospitalizations and deaths. Johnson & Johnson has a slightly lower overall efficacy rate when it comes to preventing milder infections, but it was tested later in the pandemic against variants that were not yet circulating when the other two vaccines were tested.

**Q:** **Was the vaccine approval rushed?**

**A:** It is true that the vaccine development process was sped up to quickly and safely develop vaccines. However, no safety review hurdles were skipped. The main reasons these vaccines have been developed and tested more quickly are advances in technology and the dedication of resources. Many vaccine researchers dropped everything to focus on a COVID-19 vaccine, and the federal government funded all clinical trials for all phases of promising vaccines, which removed months of application and funding hurdles. In addition, parts of the vaccine development process occurred at the same time, such as beginning manufacturing during the approval process.

**Q:** **I'd rather get COVID-19 than the vaccine.**

**A:** We do not know how long immunity lasts for those who were previously infected, and we have seen people contract COVID-19 more than once. What we do know is that COVID-19 has caused very serious illness and death for a lot of people. If you get COVID-19, you also risk giving it to others who may get very sick. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine is a safer choice to protect yourself, your loved ones and our community.



### **Discussion Question:**

Are there any other questions I can help answer? For those I may not be able to answer, you can visit UNC Health's website, [www.YourShot.org](http://www.YourShot.org) or the NC Division of Health and Human Services website.