

BOOSTER & ADDITIONAL DOSE FAQ

Updated on April 26, 2022

This information is based on currently available scientific evidence, reports, and expert opinion, and is subject to change. This document is accurate as of April 2022 and will be frequently updated as new evidence and information becomes available.

What is a booster shot?

A booster shot is an additional dose of a vaccine given after the initial recommended primary series. Boosters are administered as an additional layer of defense to restore protection which may have decreased over time. In the context of the highly transmissible Omicron variant and its subvariants, boosters offer a substantial increase in protection against symptomatic infection and are recommended by the FDA and CDC for all eligible populations. Over 100 million fully vaccinated people in the U.S. have received an additional or booster dose, offering the highest level of protection against the virus. *The CDC recommends most people receive a booster dose of one of the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna) over a Johnson & Johnson booster dose in most situations, where possible. Speak to your doctor to learn more.*

Who is eligible to receive a booster shot?

The FDA authorized booster shots for people ages 12 and up, between 2 and 5 months after completion of the primary COVID-19 vaccine series (depending on which vaccine was used for the primary series/dose), per the below table.

Primary Vaccine	Booster (#1)	Eligible Groups	Booster Dose Type	Booster Dose Volume
Pfizer	At least 5 months after primary series completion	Adults (18+)	Any available vaccine (mRNA recommended in most situations)	30 µg (same as each dose of primary)
Pfizer	At least 5 months after primary series completion	Children ages 12-17	Pfizer vaccine only	30 µg (same as each dose of primary)
Moderna	At least 5 months after primary series completion	Adults (18+)	Any available vaccine (mRNA recommended in most situations)	50 µg (half of each dose of primary)
Janssen/J&J	At least 2 months after primary dose administration	Adults (18+)	Any available vaccine (mRNA recommended in most situations)	0.50 mL (same as primary single dose)

On March 29, 2022, the FDA authorized a second booster dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine for older people and immunocompromised individuals (Janssen/J&J is not authorized for use as a second booster). A second booster dose of either vaccine may be administered to people age 50+ at least 4 months after receipt of a first booster dose of any authorized or approved vaccine. A second booster of the vaccine may be administered to individuals age 12+ with certain kinds of immunocompromise (Pfizer) or to individuals age 18+ with certain kinds of immunocompromise (Moderna) at least 4 months after receipt of a first booster dose of any authorized or approved vaccine. Speak to your healthcare provider or refer to the [CDC website](#) to understand what conditions may constitute these types of immunocompromise. The FDA also authorized a second booster dose of an mRNA vaccine to anyone who received 2 doses of the Janssen/J&J vaccine (for both their primary dose and booster) at least 4 months ago, regardless of age or level of immunocompromise. In all cases the dosage of the second booster is the same as the first booster.

At this time, while the CDC recommends everyone be up to date with their COVID-19 vaccination (up to date refers to a person having received all recommended doses in their primary vaccine series, and a booster dose, when eligible), receipt of a second booster dose is not necessary to be considered up to date.

Instead, the CDC recommends that eligible people consider their own personal risk—including level of immunocompromise and underlying medical conditions, exposure to people who are at increased risk of severe disease or who cannot be vaccinated, exposure to increased risk of COVID-19 through occupational, institutional, or other activities (such as travel), and level of community spread—with their healthcare provider to consider if and when a second booster may be appropriate and recommended. The CDC recommends that eligible people with recent COVID-19 infection within the past 3 months and those who may be hesitant about getting another recommended booster dose in the future (as a booster dose may be more important in the fall and/or if a variant-specific vaccine is needed) may consider waiting to receive a second booster dose. Speak to your healthcare provider to discuss your own level of risk and the potential recommended timing for a second booster dose if you are eligible.

If I received one type of vaccine, can I receive a different type of vaccine as a booster shot?

Yes. The FDA authorized providers to boost people with a different vaccine from the one they initially received, referred to as “mix-and-match”. If you do choose to receive a booster that is different from the vaccine you received for your primary series/dose, you should do so at the recommended interval for the booster dose of your original vaccine.

The CDC now recommends the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) as preferred options over the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in most situations for primary and booster vaccination due to the higher risk of adverse events with J&J. Speak with your medical provider if you have questions about this recommendation.

If vaccinated people are still getting infected with COVID-19, why should I get a booster shot?

COVID-19 vaccines are primarily intended to lower your risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from the virus; they continue to do this very well. While more people are becoming infected with the Omicron variant, the vaccines continue to protect well against serious illness if you do become infected; however, booster doses offer a substantial jump in effectiveness against symptomatic infection.

This means that the vast majority of cases among people who are vaccinated and boosted are either asymptomatic or mild. Unvaccinated people continue to be at significant risk of serious illness or death. People admitted to the hospital with serious illness during this surge are overwhelmingly unvaccinated. The best way you can protect yourself from severe illness is to get boosted as soon as possible.

What is a third dose? Is it different than a booster?

A third dose is for people who are severely immunocompromised and is considered a part of their initial series. Vaccine effectiveness for those who are immunocompromised is lower than for those who are not immunocompromised, so the extra dose prompts an additional immune response to increase initial immunity. A booster, on the other hand, is an additional dose recommended to “boost” immunity after it naturally wanes over time.

People ages 5+ who are moderately or severely immunocompromised who received an mRNA vaccine for their first and second doses are eligible for a third dose of the shot they received, 28 days after their second dose (note that children ages 5-17 are only eligible to receive the Pfizer vaccine at this time). Those who initially received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine may receive a second additional dose of an mRNA vaccine at least 4 weeks after their initial J&J dose.

The CDC recommends that immunocompromised adults who completed an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine primary series and received a third mRNA vaccine dose should receive a single COVID-19 booster dose (Pfizer, Moderna, or Johnson & Johnson) 2 months (Johnson & Johnson) or 3 months (Pfizer or Moderna) after completing their third mRNA vaccine dose. Those who completed an mRNA vaccine primary series may also receive a fifth dose of an mRNA vaccine (second booster) at least 4 months after dose 4. This means that adults who are moderately and severely immunocompromised may receive a total of either 4 or 5 COVID-19 vaccine doses.

This information is constantly evolving; immunocompromised people should speak to their clinical provider to learn more about appropriate timing of vaccination. Learn more about booster doses for moderately and severely immunocompromised on the [CDC website here](#).

What side effects should I expect from an additional dose or booster dose?

Side effects from an additional dose or booster dose of the vaccine are similar to those observed from initial doses. These side effects can include pain or swelling at the injection site, fatigue, fever, headache and are generally mild and most common the day after vaccination.

How do I get a booster shot?

Booster shots will be distributed in similar ways as doses in the initial series. You can search online for vaccine locations in your area here: <https://www.vaccines.gov/search/>. Refer to your local health department or doctor for more details, as there may be opportunities not listed on this website. Speak with your doctor or local public health department regarding additional questions about eligibility or access.

The ideas presented in this document reflect the latest public health thinking and scientific evidence as of April 2022. You are advised that the COVID-19 vaccine landscape remains highly fluid, and it is your responsibility to ensure that decisions are made based on the most up-to-date information available. Partners In Health does not provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment in the United States. Always seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions regarding a medical condition. The information, including but not limited to, text, graphics, images and other material contained in this document, are intended for informational purposes only.