

Experts Answer Your Questions About the New Covid Booster Vaccines

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The following questions were answered by John Rovers:



John Rovers is Professor of Pharmacy & Health Sciences at Drake University. He teaches various public health topics in the Health Sciences and Pharmacy curricula.

1. *Do I really need the new booster if I am already vaccinated and boosted?*

Yes. The original vaccines and boosters provided protection against the early strains of the Covid virus. The new booster also protects against the more recent and more infectious Omicron strain. We need to be protected against both, so the new booster is recommended.

2. *Can I get the flu shot and the new booster at the same time or should I wait and do them separately?*

YES! In fact, it's recommended because it's more convenient than having to go the pharmacy or clinic twice.

3. *Which booster should I get? Does it matter? Moderna or Pfizer? Do I need to get the same booster as previously?*

It does not matter. When you get your flu shot, you can receive whichever Covid booster vaccine the pharmacy or clinic has in stock that day. Both vaccines provide good protection.

The following questions were answered by Dr. Ashlesha Kaushik



Dr. Ashlesha Kaushik, M.D., FAAP is Medical Director of Pediatric Infectious Diseases and Director of Antimicrobial Stewardship Program at Unity Point Health, Sioux City, Iowa, and Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine. Dr. Kaushik is Centers CDC Childhood Immunization Champion for Iowa.

4. *If I recently had COVID, should I wait to get the new booster?*

According to the CDC, you may consider waiting for 3 months to receive the booster to improve immune response. However, certain factors, such as personal risk of severe disease, or risk of disease in a loved one or close contact, local COVID-19 Community Level, and the most common COVID-19 variant currently causing illness, could be reasons to get a vaccine sooner rather than later.

5. *I haven't heard much about the new COVID booster, should I get it*
YES!

It is a bivalent vaccine containing the original virus that caused COVID-19 as well as the omicron variant thus providing effective protection against severe disease, risk of hospitalization and death from COVID

6. *Is the new COVID booster approved for children?*

Yes, everyone over 5 years of age can get the updated bivalent booster 2 months after completion of primary series or previous booster, regardless of previous boosters. Boosters are not recommended for children below 5 years of age at this time.

7. *What are the side effects of the new booster? Are they different than the first shots?*

Common side effects are mild and transient, similar to previous booster shots including injection site pain, fatigue, headache, fever

8. *Do we need to keep track of these booster shots on our vaccination cards?*

CDC recommends getting the bivalent booster 2 months after receipt of last Covid vaccine (completion of primary series or previous booster), regardless of any previous boosters.

You should get your vaccine card updated when you receive the bivalent booster.

The following questions were answered by Karrey Shannon.



Karrey Shannon is the Community Health Nurse at Johnson County Public Health in Iowa City, IA. Johnson County Public Health is the public health authority of Johnson County and maintains its capacity to prioritize health issues and address the health needs of the community through its collaboration and partnerships with community partners to implement programs that either address or support the 10 essential services of public health.

9. *What is the bivalent booster? And why should I get it?*

Two COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers, Pfizer and Moderna, have developed bivalent formulations of COVID-19 boosters, and they first became available September 2, 2022. Bivalent boosters are called “bivalent” because they protect against both the original COVID-19 virus as well as the Omicron variants BA.4 and BA.5. The COVID-19 virus has changed over time through mutation, with newly-forming versions of the virus being labeled “variants”. These changes over time are well-known to scientists, and are common among spreading viruses. Previous boosters are called “monovalent” because they were designed to protect against the original virus that causes COVID-19. They provide some protection against the

Omicron variants, it is not as specialized as the new bivalent boosters. According to data collected and analyzed over the course of the COVID-19 disease presence, Omicron seems to cause less severe illness and death in general, but seems to be spread more easily than earlier variants, and may even more easily cause reinfections in people who have recently recovered from the virus. These cases, even if objectively less serious than infections from previous variants, have the potential to put further stress on healthcare resources already spread thin from the previous course of the disease in the U.S. healthcare system, which could potentially lead to more deaths.

10. *Where can I get the new COVID booster?*

If you have access to the internet, one of the easiest resources for finding out where you can receive your booster is [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov). This website allows you to search by zip code to find locations local to you where both primary series and booster doses are available. It also helps you find places local to you to receive seasonal influenza vaccines. Without internet access, you can text your zip code to 438829 to receive a list of local vaccination locations. You can also call 1-800-232-0233 to reach the CDC's COVID-19 Information Line, which can provide information about at-home test kits, vaccination provider locations, and will allow you to speak to a live person for more information. Another resource for locating booster locations near you is your local health department!

11. *What is considered up to date on COVID Boosters?*

For most people, you are up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines if you have completed a COVID-19 vaccine primary series and received the most recent booster dose recommended for you by the CDC. They currently recommend that people 5 years and older receive one updated (bivalent) booster if it has been at least 2 months since their last COVID-19 vaccine dose, whether it was their primary series or an original monovalent booster. Even those who have received more than one booster with the monovalent formulation are recommended to get a bivalent dose in order to be considered fully up to date. For those who are moderately or severely immunocompromised, the CDC recommends that they receive an extra dose from their primary vaccination series before receiving boosters. For those too young to receive bivalent booster doses at this time (6 months to 4 years), they are considered up to date once they have received their primary series. If they received Pfizer for their primary series, they need a first dose, a second dose 3-8 weeks after the first, and a third dose at least 8 weeks after the second dose. If they received Moderna for their primary series, they need a first dose followed by a second dose 4-8 weeks later, with no 3rd dose or booster available at this time.

The following were answered by Jen Lee.



12. *Is proof of COVID vaccination still needed to travel to certain places?*

Per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), COVID-19 vaccination requirements for domestic travel within the United States vary based on the mode of transportation, travel company, and specific state, tribal, local, and territorial requirements. Domestic travel requirements are updated regularly on this website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html>

- Per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), for international travel outside of the United States:
 - The rules vary based on the country to which the individual is traveling, with the country-specific entry and exit requirements updated regularly on this website: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/COVID-19-Country-Specific-Information.html>
- Per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), for international travel to the United States:
 - If you are a non-U.S. citizen who is a nonimmigrant (not a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, lawful permanent resident, or traveling to the United States on an immigrant visa), you will need to show proof of being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 before you travel by air to the United States from a foreign country.
 - Some categories of noncitizen, nonimmigrants are excepted from this requirement. If you meet the criteria for one of these categories, you will need to fulfill additional requirements to travel by air to the United States.
 - United States entry and exit requirements updated regularly on this website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/international-travel-during-covid19.html>

13. *How long does the protection from the new booster last?*

Research is currently studying how long the new booster will be protective, but it will likely act like earlier boosters, providing optimal protection for two-to-four months, good protection for four-to-six months, and less protection, but still some, after six months



Iowa Immunizes is a coalition of individuals and organizations committed to protecting the health of Iowans through vaccination of children and adults. Iowa Immunizes is supported by Iowa Public Health Association. Iowa Public Health Association is the non-partisan, nonprofit membership organization of public health professionals and allies in Iowa. Together, we work to inform the public, educate our members, and influence policy-makers on matters critical to public health. If you'd like to learn more about Iowa Immunizes, please visit www.iowaimmunizes.org and visit www.iowapha.org to learn more about Iowa Public Health Association.