COVID-19 Vaccine

Ask a VA Doctor

Ask a VA Doc about the safety of COVID-19 Vaccination

How much safer are you after getting vaccinated?

- All COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at protecting people from becoming seriously ill, hospitalized, or dying from COVID-19. They are also the best way to protect others from getting infected with the coronavirus.

- If enough Americans become vaccinated, it will contribute to ending the COVID-19 pandemic.

- For the two-dose Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, full protection is achieved 14 days after the second dose of vaccine.

- For the single-dose Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine, full protection is achieved 14 days after vaccination.

- See this CDC page, "When You've Been Fully Vaccinated" (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html) for additional information about the activities you can engage in safely 2 weeks after your last dose.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

- Yes! All three currently available COVID-19 vaccines have been carefully reviewed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to make sure they are safe.

- The FDA, CDC, and VHA are using extensive safety monitoring systems to make sure any safety concerns are identified and, if they are, to quickly take action.

- COVID-19 vaccines were tested in clinical trials involving tens of thousands of people.

- About 30% of U.S. participants in clinical trials were Hispanic, African American, Asian or Native American. There were no significant safety concerns identified in these or any other groups.

- COVID-19 vaccines do not affect your DNA. In mRNA vaccines, such as the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, mRNA never enters the nucleus of the body's cell and does not affect or interact with a person's DNA.

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What are the side effects of the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Janssen COVID-19 vaccines?

- All three COVID-19 vaccines may cause some side effects. You may have pain, redness, and swelling where you got the shot. You may also have a fever, body aches, tiredness, headache, or nausea. These side effects are normal and should go away within a few days. They mean your body is building up immunity to the COVID-19 virus.

- Talk to your VA health care team about taking over-the-counter medicine, such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, aspirin, or antihistamines, for any pain and discomfort you may experience after getting your second shot. You can also find some tips for reducing your discomfort on the CDC website (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/expect/after.html)

Is the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine safe?

- On April 13, 2021, CDC and FDA recommended pausing use of the Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) COVID-19 vaccine while they investigated reports of rare and serious blood clots called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) in vaccine recipients.

- On April 23, after careful review and evaluation, CDC and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommended resuming use of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine and stated their confidence that this vaccine is safe for use and effective in preventing COVID-19.

What are the risks of getting vaccinated?

- All of the currently available COVID-19 vaccines are both safe and effective, with the exception of those that have a history of a severe allergic reaction to any of the vaccine ingredients.

- The risk of a serious allergic reaction from any of the vaccines is rare. If a severe reaction does occur, it can be treated.

- Women under age 50 should talk with their health care provider about the extremely rare risk for blood clots and low platelets from the single-dose Janssen vaccine.

- Your primary care team can help you determine the best vaccine based on your medical history and needs.

- People who had immune-mediated thrombosis (blood clotting) syndromes in the past 90 days should talk with their provider before getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

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