COVID-19 Bivalent Booster Information and Frequently Asked Questions

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Background
Though infections are currently dropping, COVID-19 continues in our communities. With fall and winter coming and more activities moving indoors, it is predicted that COVID-19 cases will rise again. Boosters are the best way to prevent infection, lessen the severity of COVID, and lessen the likely of long COVID-19 (symptoms that persist beyond a month). In September, the FDA approved a new bivalent booster intended to be more effective for current and future COVID variants. These boosters are being rolled out as a national effort to lessen the burden of COVID-19.

Below are FAQs to address questions on bivalent boosters and current best practices.

What
What is a booster? Boosters are an additional dose of vaccine intended to bolster immunity. Immunity can lessen over time, so a booster keeps antibody levels higher and offers improved protection against serious infection. Vaccines have been very effective at reducing severe infection and reducing hospitalizations and death. While the vaccine and booster do not stop you from getting COVID-19, infections are milder than in unvaccinated persons.

What is the new bivalent booster and how is it different from prior boosters? Both Pfizer and Moderna have developed a bivalent booster. There are slight age differences with Pfizer being available to those over 12 years of age and Moderna for over 18 years of age. The bivalent booster has elements to respond to prior COVID-19 variants along with the current dominant Omicron variant. As such, it will generate a more broad-based immune response to current and future infections.

Can I get COVID if I have had a booster? Yes, but any resulting illness will be milder. Data also suggests that long COVID (the persistence of symptoms for greater than a month) is much less common in vaccinated and boosted people.

Will I need to get a booster every year, like a flu shot? We don’t know yet. COVID has less of a seasonality than does influenza.

Will the bivalent booster affect a COVID test? The COVID vaccine or the bivalent booster will not give you a positive test for COVID, nor make you contagious.

If I get a booster, do I still have to stay masked? Masking requirements are in place in certain work settings (healthcare and congregate settings), after a close contact exposure, and during a workplace outbreak. They are encouraged in all other settings. Booster status does not change mask requirements.
Who
Who is eligible for new bivalent booster? The CDC, the California Department of Public Health, and the SF Department of Public Health all broadly recommend that anyone over 12 years old get a bivalent booster, whether they have had any prior boosters. DHR recommends that all employees receive a bivalent booster when they are eligible.

Will the bivalent booster be required? It depends where you work. Employees who are required to have a booster (under current health orders from San Francisco Department of Public Health and the California Department of Public Health), are those working in healthcare settings or in congregate settings. Those who have already received a booster are not required to also receive a bivalent booster, but they are encouraged to do so. If they have yet to receive any booster, it will be the bivalent booster, as the prior formations of boosters are no longer available.

Do I need to have the prior booster in order to receive the bivalent booster?
No. The bivalent booster can be administered whether an employee has had a prior booster: one or two or no prior booster. It is available to all over age 12. Employees are encouraged to follow CDC booster recommendations which include receipt of subsequent boosters like the bivalent booster. [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html)

Can I also receive a flu shot? Many locations are offering both annual flu vaccine and bivalent boosters at the same time. This is allowable, and convenient.

How
Where can I find a bivalent booster?
Abundant boosters have been distributed across healthcare settings, local pharmacies, and retail locations. There is easy access for appointments. You can search on your smart phone for bivalent boosters near you or go to [www.myturn.ca.gov](http://www.myturn.ca.gov) to find a location near you.

Will the booster be included in my vaccine record? Yes. All COVID vaccine doses are centrally recorded by the State and are included in your vaccine record. If you downloaded a vaccine record at [www.myvaccinerecord.ca.gov](http://www.myvaccinerecord.ca.gov) will have this information. Your health care provider also can access this information, but your employer cannot.

How do I share my booster status with my department? You may upload your booster information to People and Pay by going to the Employee Gateway [https://sfgov.org/sfc/employee-gateway](https://sfgov.org/sfc/employee-gateway) and accessing the Employee Portal using your DSW Number. Look for the Employee page and click “Update/View Vaccine Status”.

When
What timing is best for my bivalent booster?
It is recommended at least two months after your primary series or your last booster, or COVID-19 infection. However, delaying longer such as four to six months after your prior booster or infection may be best. Older employees or those with immunocompromised health may seek the booster sooner, closer to 2 months.
Leave
Can I do this on worktime? No. Employees can use accrued sick leave or COV leave to attend booster appointments or to visit drop-in sites. Many locations have weekend or evening appointments.

If I feel sick after my booster, can I use sick leave? Yes. If you have a side effect from your booster that makes you unable to work, you may use accrued sick leave, or COV leave.