



COVID-19 Management, Vaccination, and Prevention Information Frequently Asked Questions

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Background

COVID-19 has continued to persist in our communities, with cases rising and falling multiple times. Vaccination remains the most effective way to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Although vaccination is no longer a condition of employment, it is still highly recommended.

Below are answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that address common questions on COVID-19 management, vaccination, and prevention. The answers reflect the current recommendations for minimizing the risk of COVID-19 and the evolving science and understanding of the virus.

COVID-19 Prevention

How can I prevent myself from getting COVID-19?

Vaccination remains the most effective protection against severe illness. Handwashing, masking in crowded settings, and maintaining good hygiene are always recommended but especially during increases in COVID-19 cases.

Do I have to do a daily health screen?

Yes, employees are still asked to do a daily health screen. Employees should not come to work sick and risk sharing their illnesses with colleagues or the public.

COVID-19 Management

Why was there a change in guidance?

Guidance has been updated as of January 2024 to accommodate the wide range of responses COVID-19 infection, from no symptoms to mild symptoms to more serious illness. Basing isolation on the length of time needed for an individual to improve allows mild cases to return safely to work sooner, serious cases to be out longer, and asymptomatic cases to continue at work.

What if I test positive for COVID-19 and am symptomatic?

Isolation is recommended for symptomatic COVID-19 infections. Individuals should isolate for a minimum of 24 hours from the onset of symptoms. Employees may return to work once they have been fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medications AND their symptoms are mild and improving.

How long should I isolate?

Isolation duration depends on symptom severity. Isolation may be as short as 24 hours for mild cases but could extend for several days or longer if symptoms are more serious.

What if I have no symptoms?

People who test positive for COVID but have no symptoms can continue to work despite their positive test. They should continue to watch for symptoms, and if they develop symptoms, they must follow the isolation protocol noted above.

What if I have symptoms and test negative?

Employees who are sick should stay home to prevent spreading illness, regardless of whether their symptoms are due to COVID-19 or another respiratory illness.

Do I need to have a negative COVID-19 test to return to work?

Most employees do not need a negative test to return to work. However, healthcare workers and Emergency Medical Technicians must provide a negative test if they return to work before 10 days of isolation.

Do I have to mask?

Masking for ten days is required for anyone testing positive for COVID 19 whether they have symptoms or not.

What should I do if exposed to someone with COVID-19?

After a close contact exposure (sharing the same airspace for more than 15 minutes over a 24-hour period), you must mask for the following ten days. You may continue to work but should test if you develop symptoms. COVID-19 testing is no longer routine for all COVID-19 exposures but recommended only for those at higher risk of severe disease or who have contact with those at higher risk of severe disease.

COVID-19 Vaccination

What is the updated COVID-19 vaccine?

The latest COVID-19 vaccine is designed to improve immunity against recent variants. Like the annual influenza vaccine, the COVID-19 vaccine is regularly updated. Both Pfizer and Moderna developed an updated version approved by the FDA in August 2024, with Novavax approved shortly after. While the vaccine may not stop you from getting COVID-19, the infections are milder than in unvaccinated persons.

Can I have a different vaccine manufacturer than my previous COVID-19 vaccination?

Yes. There is not a problem with so called 'mix and match,' and there is not a reason to wait to access one brand over another for the vaccines.

What are my COVID-19 vaccine choices if I am unable to take mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna)?

Employees may discuss their best vaccine options with their healthcare provider. Novavax uses particles of spike protein to generate immunity (similar to hepatitis or shingles vaccines) instead of mRNA technology. It has been approved by the FDA for 12-year-olds and up. Johnson & Johnson, a non- mRNA vaccine, has not been available in the USA since May 2023.

What are the updated COVID-19 vaccine's side effects?

Similar to the initial COVID-19 vaccination, there is a wide range of responses to current formulations, from noting no change to a sore arm at the site of the vaccination to body aches and flu-like symptoms.

Can I get COVID-19 if I have been vaccinated and/or had a booster?

Yes. However, any resulting illness will be milder. Long COVID-19 (the persistence of symptoms for greater than four weeks after COVID-19 infection) is much less common in those who are vaccinated.

Will the updated vaccine affect a COVID-19 test?

No. Receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, including the current formulation, will not give you a positive test for COVID-19, nor will it give you the illness or make you contagious.

If I receive the updated vaccine, do I still need to mask?

Yes, if there is a masking requirement in place. Masking is required after close contact exposure in the workplace, during a workplace outbreak, and is required for ten days after a COVID-19 illness whether asymptomatic or with symptoms. You are encouraged but not required to mask in other crowded settings, such as on transit. Receipt of any vaccine does not alter masking requirements or guidelines.

Do I need the new Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine?

The RSV vaccine, recently available for adults over age 60, is recommended for those at higher risk of severe respiratory illness. Discuss with your healthcare provider if it is appropriate for you.

Who is required to have a COVID-19 vaccine?

There is no current requirement for COVID-19 vaccination. COVID-19 vaccination is encouraged but not required.

Who is eligible for the new COVID-19 vaccine?

Anyone over six months old is eligible, as recommended by the CDC, California Department of Public Health, and San Francisco Department of Public Health. DHR recommends that all City employees receive an updated COVID-19 vaccine when they are eligible.

When is the best time for a COVID-19 vaccination?

Vaccination is recommended at least three months after the last dose or three to six months after recent COVID infection. Immunocompromised or older individuals may choose to vaccinate sooner after discussing with their health provider.

Can the current vaccine be used as a first-time or primary vaccination?

Yes. The updated COVID-19 vaccine has now replaced the previous formulations.

Can I receive the new vaccine without prior boosters?

Yes, the updated vaccine can be administered to those with or without prior COVID-19 vaccinations. The current M-RNA vaccines are available to everyone over six months of age. Employees are encouraged to follow CDC vaccine recommendations, which include receipt of newer formulations like the bivalent vaccine. To find out if you are current on your vaccinations, visit the CDC's [Staying Up to Date with COVID-19 Vaccines webpage](#).

Can I get a flu shot with the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. Some locations may offer both the annual flu vaccine and the current COVID vaccine simultaneously. Receiving both vaccines at the same time is both convenient and supported in medical literature. HSS will host open enrollment benefit fairs this fall that will offer annual influenza vaccination only. Locations and dates can be found here: sfhss.org/well-being/flu-prevention.

How do I find a COVID-19 vaccine?

Visit www.vaccine.gov or myturn.ca.gov, or check local pharmacies. New COVID vaccines have been widely distributed across healthcare settings, local pharmacies, and retail locations beginning in September 2024.

Do I share my vaccine status with my department?

No, you do not need to share your vaccine information.

Leave

Can I get vaccinated on work time?

No, but you may use accrued sick leave to attend appointments. Many locations offer weekend or evening appointments.

Can I use sick leave if I feel sick after vaccination?

Yes. If you have a side effect from your vaccination that makes you unable to work, you may use accrued sick leave.

What type of leave do I use if I get COVID-19?

There is no longer a specific "COVID-19 leave." Days missed due to COVID-19 will be covered through accrued sick leave.

COVID-19 Tracking

Why are COVID-19 case totals no longer tracked?

In San Francisco and across the United States, COVID-19 case numbers are no longer tracked as they underestimate actual cases. Most testing has shifted to home rapid tests, and results from these are not collected in a standardized way.

How is COVID-19 tracked?

COVID-19 presence in our communities is monitored through community vaccination rates, test positivity from lab-run COVID-19 tests, and levels of the virus detected in wastewater.