



## COVID-19 Vaccination Information Frequently Asked Questions

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### **Background:**

COVID-19 continues to persist in our communities and is projected to rise during the winter months. Vaccination is the best way to prevent serious infection, including hospitalization and death, and lessen the likelihood of long COVID-19 (symptoms that persist at least four weeks after primary COVID-19 infection). In September 2023, the FDA approved a new COVID-19 vaccine that is more effective for current and near future COVID variants. CDC recommends this COVID-19 vaccine for all people over six months of age.

The below Frequently Asked Questions address current best practices on COVID-19 vaccination

### **What**

#### **What is the updated COVID-19 vaccine?**

The updated COVID-19 vaccine is the most current vaccine formulated to generate immunity and provide an effective response to recent COVID-19 variants. Immunity from a vaccine can decrease over time and be less effective to new strains or variants. While the vaccine may not stop you from getting COVID-19, the infections are milder than in unvaccinated persons.

Both Pfizer and Moderna developed an updated COVID-19 vaccine approved by the FDA in September 2023. Once the new vaccination was approved by the FDA, the previously available bivalent booster was no longer authorized.

#### **Is the updated COVID-19 vaccine a booster?**

No. We are moving away from using the term booster since this is a different vaccine that is formulated in response to current variants. It is similar to the annual flu vaccination: where there is an updated vaccination each year.

#### **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 vaccine choices if I am unable to take mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna)?**

Employees may discuss with their healthcare provider what are their best vaccine options. Novavax uses particles of spike protein to generate immunity instead of mRNA technology. Johnson & Johnson, a non- mRNA vaccine, has been unavailable in the USA since May 2023.

#### **Can I get COVID if I have been vaccinated and/or had a booster?**

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

**Will I need to get an updated vaccine every year, like a flu shot?**

Yes, likely. It is currently recommended that people receive at least one dose of the current vaccine to have the best and most up-to-date protection.

**Will the updated vaccine affect a COVID test?**

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

**If I get the updated vaccine, do I still have to stay masked?**

Yes, if there is a masking requirement in place. Masking requirements are in place in specific work settings. For example, as of mid-August 2023, the local Health Officer order requires masking in healthcare facilities when working with patients, clients, or residents, and businesses or facilities can impose their own masking requirements. Masking is also required after close contact exposure in the workplace and during a workplace outbreak. 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.

**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.

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

You can discuss with your health care provider if it is appropriate for you. This newly developed and recently available vaccine is for older adults over age 60 who have a greater possibility for severe respiratory illness from RSV.

**Who**

**Who is required to have a COVID-19 vaccine?**

All City employees were required to have a COVID-19 vaccination from 11/1/2021 to 8/23/2023. The requirement was rescinded on 8/23/2023. Primary vaccination is encouraged but not required unless the employee works in a sector with other local, state, or federal requirements, such as in health care settings.

**Who is eligible for the new COVID-19 vaccine?**

It is broadly recommended that anyone over 6 months old receive an updated vaccination. This recommendation comes from the CDC, the California Department of Public Health, and the SF Department of Public Health. DHR recommends that all City employees receive an updated COVID-19 vaccine when they are eligible.

**Will the City require the updated vaccine for employees?**

No, unless employees are required by other regulations or health orders. Employees required to be vaccinated (under current health orders from SFDPH) are those working in healthcare settings or congregate settings such as the jail. Those who already received an earlier COVID-19 booster are also not required to receive the new COVID-19 vaccine but are encouraged to do so.

**When:**

**What timing is best to receive an updated COVID-19 vaccination?**

It is recommended at least two months after your previous dose or three months after a recent COVID infection. Older employees or those with immunocompromised health may seek earlier vaccination and should discuss with their health provider.

**Do I need to have the prior booster in order to receive the new COVID-19 vaccine?**

No. The current COVID-19 vaccine can be administered whether an employee has had a prior booster, has been vaccinated with the original formulation, or has received no vaccine yet for COVID-19. The current vaccine is 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. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html>

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

Yes. Since April 2023, the original formulations of the mRNA monovalent COVID-19 vaccines were no longer available. The bivalent vaccine then replaced the original formulation of the mRNA vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna. The new COVID vaccination has now replaced the previous bivalent formulation.

**Can I also receive a flu shot at the same time as a 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: <https://sfhss.org/well-being/flu-prevention>

**How**

**How do I find the new COVID-19 vaccine?**

You can search on your computer or smart phone [www.vaccine.gov](http://www.vaccine.gov) to find a location near you, or through your local pharmacy website. New COVID vaccines have been widely distributed across healthcare settings, local pharmacies, and retail locations beginning in mid-September 2023.

**Do I share my vaccine status with my department?**

No, unless you work in healthcare settings or congregate settings such as the jail. If you work in one of these settings, you can upload your vaccine information to People and Pay by going to the Employee Gateway at <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."

**Leave:**

**Can I receive a COVID-19 vaccine dose on work time?**

No. Employees can use accrued sick leave to attend vaccine appointments or to visit drop-in sites. Many locations have weekend or evening appointments.

**If I feel sick after my vaccine, can I use sick leave?**

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