



COVID-19 Management, Vaccination, and Prevention Information

Frequently Asked Questions

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Background

COVID-19 has persisted in our communities and has risen during the winter months. Vaccination continues as the best way to prevent serious infection, including hospitalization and death. In September 2023, the FDA approved a new COVID-19 vaccine which the CDC recommends for all people over six months of age. In January 2024, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) updated the guidance on the management of COVID-19 infections.

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

COVID-19 Tracking

Why are COVID-19 case totals no longer tracked?

In San Francisco (and across the United States) COVID-19 numbers are no longer tracked as the totals are underestimating the numbers of real cases. With most COVID-19 testing having moved to home rapid tests, rapid test results are not uniformly collected.

How is COVID-19 tracked?

Tracking of COVID-19 presence in our communities comes from COVID-19 hospitalization rates, from vaccination rates, and from COVID-19 levels found in wastewater.

COVID-19 Management

What is the current management of COVID-19 infection?

Isolation for COVID-19 infection changed from a time-based isolation requirement (minimum of 5 days) to a symptom-based requirement. Isolate for a minimum of 24 hours from the day of symptom onset. COVID-19 cases may return to work if 24 hours have passed with no fever, without the use of fever reducing medication, AND their symptoms are mild and improving.

How long do I isolate?

It depends on how bad your symptoms are. It may be as short as 24 hours, or several days for a mild case, or longer if more serious.

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

No, for most employees. If you work in health care or are an Emergency Medical Technician, then you must show a negative COVID-19 test if you leave isolation sooner than ten days and return to work.

Why is there a change in guidance?

The updated guidance reflects the wide range of responses from those infected with COVID-19: 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. The 2024 COVID-19 management reflects the evolving understanding of the infectivity of current variants.

Will CDC also change their isolation recommendations?

Currently, the CDC has not updated its isolation guidance, though, it has been reported that it will align with the CDPH recommendations.

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?

We do not want employees at work who are sick. There are many other contagious respiratory illnesses other than COVID-19 that could cause an employee to become sick. Sick employees should stay home and not share their illness with others.

Do I have to mask?

Masking for 10 days is required for anyone testing positive for COVID 19 whether they have symptoms or not.

I have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, what do I do?

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 10 days. You may continue to work, and 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 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 available.

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 the 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 not been available 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. 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. Masking is required for 10 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.

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 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 health. 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.

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 do I find a COVID-19 vaccine?

You can search on your computer or smart phone 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

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

There is no more 'COVID-19 leave' thus any days of work missed due to COVID-19 are covered through an employee's own sick leave accrual.

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.

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.

COVID-19 Prevention

How can I prevent myself from getting COVID-19?

Vaccine continues to be the strongest measure for preventing serious illness from COVID-19. Other personal steps such as handwashing and masking in crowded settings are worthwhile. Be more diligent around hygiene and masking when the region is experiencing a rise in COVID-19 cases.

Do I have to do a daily health screen?

Yes, employees are still asked to do a daily health screen. Though it is not as formal a screening process as earlier in the pandemic, employees should not come to work sick and risk sharing their illnesses with colleagues or the public.