Vaccines

What they are and how they can save your life

Vaccines are a breakthrough of modern medicine – and are the best protection we have against many serious illnesses. The World Health Organization estimates that vaccines can save up to 3 million lives every year.[1]

What is a vaccine?

Vaccines are a safe and effective way of protecting people against diseases and illnesses. When you get a vaccine, your immune system will develop resistance to that disease. You typically get a vaccine as a shot, but some can also be given as a nasal spray you inhale or a medication you drink.

How do vaccines work?

When you get a vaccine, your body will produce antibodies against that disease. Antibodies are proteins produced naturally by your immune system to fight disease. Your body will then be able to recognize and fight the disease if you're ever exposed to it later. This can significantly lower the impact of a disease or prevent you from catching it.

Why should I get vaccinated?

Vaccines are a safe way to prevent disease and save lives. Plus, they can protect you against a disease for a year, decades, or even a lifetime – depending on the specific disease. That's what makes vaccines so powerful. Rather than treating a disease after you get it, vaccines prevent you from getting sick in the first place.

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1. "Vaccines and Immunization: What is Vaccination," World Health Organization, December 30, 2020.

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What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine

How does the COVID-19 vaccine keep us safe?

Vaccines are the best protection we have against many serious illnesses. They protect us from diseases by teaching our immune systems how to fight viruses and infections – without actually getting sick from the disease.

COVID-19 can have serious and life-threatening complications, which is why it's important for everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated.

How effective are the COVID-19 vaccines?

All the authorized COVID-19 vaccines are life-saving vaccines. For a COVID-19 vaccine to get authorization from the FDA, it needs to be proven safe, and that it can prevent disease (or decrease its severity) in at least 50% of people who are vaccinated. In clinical trials, the COVID-19 vaccines all showed an 85% or higher efficacy rate for preventing severe COVID-19 illness – showing they're all highly effective.[2]

Did the clinical trials include people like me?

The COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials included adults with diverse backgrounds, races, and ethnicities, and from different geographic areas. Researchers collaborated with faith leaders, community organizations, and health clinics to ensure clinical trial volunteers included members of underrepresented and marginalized populations, and people over the age of 65, who are at higher risk of complications from the virus.

Is it safe to get a COVID-19 vaccine if you have an ongoing health condition like diabetes?

If you have an ongoing health condition like diabetes, you should talk to your doctor and confirm it's safe to get the COVID-19 vaccine. In general, if you have an ongoing condition, you're at an increased risk of getting severely sick from COVID-19. So, getting the COVID-19 vaccine is one way to protect yourself from the virus. According to the FDA, people with ongoing conditions can get the COVID-19 vaccine if they haven't had an allergic reaction to any of the ingredients in the vaccine.[3] It's best to talk with your doctor so they can assess your personal situation.

Is there a cost for the COVID-19 vaccine?

No. You should not be charged anything for a COVID-19 vaccination no matter where you get it. In fact, you should be suspicious of any entity that wants to charge you for a vaccine since it's against federal law.

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2. Kathy Katella, "Comparing the COVID-19 Vaccines: How Are They Different?" YaleMedicine.org, May 13, 2021.
3. "Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination," CDC.gov, accessed January 25, 2021.