

COVID vaccine information for CHWs

CHWs have played a key role in helping the US navigate through the COVID pandemic. So much so that in 2021, the government [increased the budget for CHW programs](#) to \$7.7B nationwide to support the fight against COVID.

The [World Health Organization](#) and other international organisms tout community health workers as a pillar of COVID awareness and prevention.

As frontline healthcare workers, CHWs have the opportunity to educate at-risk populations and facilitate access to COVID vaccines for disease prevention. Here's how.

Your role as a CHW for COVID prevention and treatment

Did you know that [Hispanic people are getting COVID at a rate that's disproportionately higher](#) than for white people? And [the COVID mortality rate is higher for Black and indigenous populations than any other group](#).

COVID-19 risk factors for underserved, remote, or low-income communities:

- The need for **public transportation** or long commutes to work or errands.
- **Jobs considered essential**, especially blue-collar jobs, that don't afford the luxury of staying home.
- **Little to no access to modern luxuries** like delivery and online orders, which are often more expensive than bulk or department stores.

Healthcare access is one of the most important services that citizens and communities need — and it's one of the systems where inequality has a crushing impact. Thankfully, your community health worker program can help slow down the spread of this terrible disease among the most vulnerable populations.

How CHWs can help COVID vaccination efforts

- ✓ **Coordinate transportation to and from vaccination centers.** For low-income and remote communities, accessing healthcare is

difficult because transportation is expensive or hard to come by.

- ✓ **Educate patients about chronic disease management.** By now we know that [certain medical conditions](#) such as hypertension and diabetes increase the risk of serious or life-threatening COVID complications. That said, it's equally important for patients to keep these conditions in check, especially when healthcare may be limited or harder to access. By monitoring their medication, exercising, eating a nutritious diet, and following health mandates such as social distancing and hygiene, your patients can feel safe and assured through this pandemic.
- ✓ **Participate in local vaccination centers.** Centers receiving patients for vaccination may be experiencing an uptick in patients and under-staffing. As frontline healthcare workers, CHWs can assist these centers and make the process smoother for patients and employees alike. CHWs can help patients fill in forms, get ready for their shot, share post-vaccine care tips, or simply help organize the center.
- ✓ **Share factual information about COVID and the vaccine.** Misinformation and lack of information are some of the biggest barriers to accessing healthcare. Especially with COVID, misinformation and myths have made it difficult for people to access the care, both preventive and curative, they need to overcome the pandemic. By sharing factual, science-backed information with your patients and communities, you're shedding light on the health risks of both the disease and the vaccine.

There are many things community health workers can do to help citizens stay safe from COVID and facilitate access to COVID vaccines, especially for remote, underserved, and at-risk populations.

That said, at CHWTraining, we've compiled the most important information your community needs about the COVID vaccine. Share this knowledge with them and encourage them to stay safe and as healthy as possible.

What's new in COVID-19 for December 2021: Vaccine updates, new variants, and updates guidelines

With COVID-19 being such a new disease, it's to be expected that new information will become available as time passes. It's also safe to assume that the SARS-CoV-2 virus (the one responsible for COVID) will continue to mutate and new variants will spread.

First, you must have heard about the delta variant. This variant emerged in early 2021, with the first US case confirmed in late February. [Yale](#) reports that Delta now accounts for most COVID cases. The delta variant of COVID-19 causes severe illness among unvaccinated patients. In fact, the [CDC](#) reports that unvaccinated patients are likelier to be hospitalized; unvaccinated patients also account for most of the new cases.

While the delta variant can infect vaccinated people with what's called a "breakthrough" case, the disease is less severe and the risk of death is lower, so experts advise that vaccines continue to be the first line of defense against the virus.

Most recently, the Omicron variant started making waves in November 2021 and its spread has caused many places to go back into lockdown.

According to the [World Health Organization](#), there are currently 3 other strains (Alpha, Beta, And Gamma) that are what's known as a cause of concern. However, these variants haven't received as much public attention as the delta and omicron variants.

What are the current vaccine guidelines for COVID-19?

The Centers for Disease Control and other health organizations including the WHO continue to stress the importance of a full course of vaccination for everyone who can get it. As of October of 2021, anyone who's 5 years old or older is eligible to get a COVID vaccine by Pfizer-BioNTech in the US; anyone who's 18 years old or older can receive either of the available vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or Johnson & Johnson). To read more about accessing the vaccine or helping your community get vaccinated, see the section [Frequently Asked Questions About the COVID Vaccine](#).

I've received my full dose(s) of the COVID vaccine. What should I do now?

How many doses you received of the COVID-19 vaccine will depend on what brand you had access to or chose.

For Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech, the full course of vaccination includes two doses administered with 3 and 4 weeks between doses, respectively. In the case of Johnson & Johnson, the vaccine is only one dose.

The CDC now recommends a booster shot under specific guidelines. Anyone is eligible to receive a booster shot if they are:

- 16 years old or older (including over 18 years old) and received the second dose of their Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine more than six months ago.
- 18 years old or older and received the second dose of their Moderna shot more than six months ago.
- 18 years old or older and received their single Johnson & Johnson shot more than two months ago.

Additionally, [anyone that's over 18 years old can choose whichever brand they prefer, regardless of what their first vaccine was, according to the CDC.](#)

What to do to stay safe from COVID

Personal protection: Face masks, hygiene, and staying safe while you can't keep social distance

Face mask guidelines are being updated by most states as vaccine efforts continue to expand. As of February 2022, people using transportation operated by public or private school systems aren't required to wear face masks, the [CDC](#) says. However, all others traveling on "public conveyances" such as airplanes, trains, and ships are required to use face masks covering their mouth and nose, regardless of vaccination status.

The CDC has also released [COVID-19 community levels](#), which are a tool to assess the risk of infection in a given area (county, state, or territory). Currently, community levels are used when making recommendations such as social distancing and mask wearing for COVID prevention.

In terms of hygiene, you should continue to wash your hands thoroughly, use antibacterials and gels with at least 60% alcohol, and keep your hands away from your face as much as possible.

You should also remain at least 6ft (or two arms' lengths away) from others who live outside of your household.

How to care for a sick loved one safely at home

To care for someone sick with COVID:

- Keep OTC medication to help relieve their symptoms – this can include antihistamines or fever medication.
- Have their doctor's number on hand – in case there's a complication or you have any questions about their care or needs.
- Make sure the person is isolated to prevent transmitting the virus to you or others.
- Limit their contact with any pets.
- Consider ordering delivery for them if you don't live with them. Or bring over the food (and stay protected while doing so).

Above all else, stay safe. Getting the disease yourself won't do any good.

How to properly clean your home after a confirmed or suspected COVID case

In general, when disinfecting your home:

- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Avoid mixing cleaning products as these can generate toxic gases and be dangerous for your health.
- Focus on high-contact spots (such as light switches, doorknobs, countertops, and TV remotes) and clean them regularly.
- If the cleaning products recommend it, wear gloves to protect your hands.

If the person is actively sick:

- If possible, have them clean their own space to prevent you or anyone who's not sick from entering the space and possibly catching the virus.

- If this isn't possible, enter sparingly, always wear a mask, and ask the sick person to also wear a mask.
- Open the outside doors and windows to ventilate the room while you're there.

The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) released a list called [List N](#) of disinfectants that are effective against COVID-19.

Frequently Asked Questions About the COVID Vaccine

First things first: What are the types of COVID vaccines?

COVID vaccines have been developed in two different categories:

mRNA vaccines: mRNA stands for Messenger RNA. [Per the CDC](#), an mRNA vaccine gives "instructions for our cells to make a harmless piece of what is called the "spike protein." The spike protein is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19." This way, if the real SARS-CoV-2 virus, the cause of COVID-19, enters the body, the immune system is able to recognize the intruder and fight it, effectively causing immunity.

On the flip side, **viral vector vaccines** include a portion of a modified virus that's **not** the virus responsible for COVID-19 to trigger an immune response.

How to get the COVID vaccine

I'm undocumented. Can I get vaccinated with no risk? How?

Yes, anyone that's 12 years or older can get vaccinated at a vaccine site. Vaccine sites cannot reject you on the basis of your immigration status. Some sites may ask for your documents for verification purposes, especially to get refunded by insurance at no cost to you, but not having an ID is no reason to get rejected at a vaccine center.

The Department of Homeland Security also [released a statement](#) in early 2020 saying, "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection will not conduct enforcement operations at or near vaccine distribution sites or clinics."

What COVID vaccines are available in the US?

The list of available COVID vaccines in the US includes:

Pfizer-BioNTech – approved for anyone 12 years and older. This vaccine consists of 2 doses, the second of which is applied 3 weeks (21 days) after the first.

Moderna – approved for anyone 18 years and older. This vaccine also consists of 2 doses, but the second one is applied 4 weeks (28 days) later than the first.

Johnson & Johnson (known as Janssen) – approved for anyone 18 years and older. This vaccine only requires one dose.

In general, all of these vaccines are safe and effective in preventing serious cases of COVID. Unless you're allergic to any ingredient in one formula, the CDC says, "The best COVID-19 vaccine is the first one that is available to you." With that, the first and second doses **must be** of the same vaccine – the CDC emphasizes that the vaccines are [not interchangeable](#).

Who can get the COVID vaccine in the US?

Vulnerable people, such as older citizens and people living with chronic lung conditions like asthma or cystic fibrosis, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, Parkinson's disease, and autoimmune conditions like HIV and lupus, are among the first for whom the vaccines were widely available.

However, as of the spring of 2021, anyone 12 years or older can get the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, one of three brands of the approved COVID vaccines. The other brands, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, are administered to people 18 years or older.

Is there a difference in age groups for each vaccine?

COVID vaccine efforts have gone through rigorous testing and monitoring to ensure the utmost protection for every patient. As studies continue to expand and prove the efficacy and safety for different age groups, it's safe to expect that the FDA will update the eligibility criteria. This is the main reason why some vaccines are recommended for children 12 and up and others are being administered to adults only.

Where do I need to go to get vaccinated?

There are different vaccine sites depending on where you live. The Wall Street Journal made this [handy guide](#) to find state information for vaccine sites near you. CHWs can spread the word and make sure residents know where to go to get vaccinated and what the requirements are. They can also help coordinate transportation for locals if the vaccine site is remote or difficult to reach without a car.

If you're curious about your state's vaccination efforts, [the Mayo Clinic keeps an updated tracker here](#).

How much do I have to pay to get the COVID vaccine?

Nothing. The COVID vaccine is free per the CDC. If you have insurance, your vaccine center may request your insurance information to bill them for your service (admin costs, staff, etc). But you will not pay for your COVID vaccine.

How to prepare for getting vaccinated against COVID

Is there anyone who shouldn't get the vaccine?

According to [Yale Health](#), people with a known history of severe allergic reactions to "any component of either an mRNA vaccine or the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine should NOT receive that vaccine." That said, most people can safely get another vaccine.

A doctor will be able to make recommendations in these cases.

My elderly family members are afraid of the vaccine. Should they be? Or should they get vaccinated?

In short, yes. Anyone who is eligible and able to get vaccinated should do so. Unless there's a risk for a severe allergic reaction to a component of the formula, the vaccine is safe.

For patients with underlying conditions or other complications, health institutions recommend consulting a healthcare expert such as a primary care physician for specific risk assessment.

How should I prepare before getting my COVID vaccine?

Taking over-the-counter medication such as ibuprofen and other NSAIDs before receiving your COVID vaccine **is not recommended**. However, it's ok to keep some on hand after your vaccine, in case you develop side effects.

In case of prescribed medications for underlying conditions, patients should seek professional medical care from the doctor or team helping manage their disease.

Other than that, the [Nebraska University Health Center](#) recommends stocking up on things like chicken soup and sports drinks — just like you would if you were recovering from a cold. They also recommend planning for a slower day in case you do get side effects from the vaccine; eating and drinking enough fluids to feel hydrated and have a settled stomach before going to the vaccine site to prevent fainting or feeling dizzy. No other specific preparation is required for your COVID vaccine.

When do side effects occur after the COVID vaccine?

Side effects from the COVID vaccine can start immediately after receiving it or up to a day or two later. Side effects can include:

- Pain or swelling in the arm where the shot was administered
- Feeling tired and/or lethargic
- Headaches
- Fever
- Muscle pain
- Nausea

Extremely rare complications have been reported from all three of the US-approved vaccines, with [Moderna and Pfizer being linked to a heart condition](#) known as myocarditis, or inflammation of the heart muscle. [The BBC](#) reports “145 cases of myocarditis and 138 cases of pericarditis out of 177m doses given” of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, or a 0.00008% chance, and “19 cases of myocarditis and 19 cases of pericarditis out of 20 million doses given” of the Moderna vaccine, or a 0.00009% chance.

In short, it seems like the side effects resulting from any COVID vaccine are similar to a cold or mild flu. Considering COVID-related risks and

complications, experts and the CDC agree that these side effects are mild and the benefits outweigh them.

How long do the side effects of the COVID vaccine last?

Most people experiencing side effects from the COVID vaccine can expect them to last a few days. If symptoms seem to be getting worse after a few days, the [CDC](#) recommends calling the doctor.

After the COVID vaccine: Stats and short term implications

Am I immune to COVID since I have the vaccine?

It takes two weeks after the last vaccine to build a robust immune response to COVID-19. That said, the vaccines are not 100% effective — effectiveness rates vary by the vaccine administered. Patients can still get COVID-19 post-vaccination, especially with the new variants, although in general, the symptoms are milder and the risk of complications is lower.

In short, no. You are not 100% immune to COVID after being vaccinated. But you are safer than you were before.

Can vaccinated people meet indoors?

If two people have received both doses and waited at least 2 weeks after the second dose, meeting indoors would be considered safe. However, many guidelines remain in place and you should stick to local and state recommendations.

What are the regulations for vaccinated people?

[According to the CDC](#), “Fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.”

Remember, fully vaccinated people means people who've received their two doses and 2 weeks have passed since the last one.

Do vaccinated people need to use a face mask?

Check your local and state requirements to find out if you need to use a face mask post-vaccination. That said, your work, school, tribe, and other facilities may have mandates you need to follow regarding face masks for COVID-19 prevention.

Can vaccinated people die from COVID?

COVID vaccines are not 100% effective in protecting against the disease. While your chances of dying from COVID-related complications are significantly lower than without the vaccine, there's still a chance of severe symptoms if you contract COVID-19.

Keep in mind: Just because restrictions are changing or being lifted, it doesn't mean that the pandemic is over.

Summer 2021 COVID Guidelines

The [latest treatment information by the National Institutes of Health](#) (NIH) was released in March 2022.

Additionally, the NIH has previously reported the [status and FDA recommendations](#) regarding COVID vaccines, PrEP, and PEP.

Regarding coronavirus-related restrictions, each state has released individual guidelines. To find yours, AARP has compiled [a handy COVID-19 guidelines list by state](#) and a [state-by-state guide regarding mask use](#).

Event planning platform Northstar Meetings group has also released [State-by-State Status Updates on Covid-19 Restrictions](#).

That said, with COVID-19, we've learned that things can change any minute. So stay tuned to local leaders to get the latest, most relevant information.