



# Massachusetts Department of Public Health

## COMMUNITY FORUM ON THE COVID-19 VACCINE

MA Municipal Association (MMA) Human Services Council

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# Acknowledging structural racism, ableism and other forms of oppression

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health recognizes that historical and current [structural racism](#), ableism, and other forms of oppression have made it difficult for some communities (such as Black people and people with disabilities) to fully trust the public health, medical and scientific community. We want to be open and honest about the safety and development of the COVID-19 vaccine—what we know and what we don't know.

This provides a foundation to have these conversations but does not address all the unique and valid needs and concerns of different populations and communities.

# What is a vaccine and how does it work?

- Vaccines prevent diseases that can be dangerous, or even deadly. They work with your body's natural defenses to safely develop protection from a disease.
- A vaccine helps your immune system to produce antibodies, just like it would if you were exposed to the disease. After getting vaccinated, you have protection from that disease, without having to get the disease first.
- This is what makes vaccines such powerful medicine. Unlike most medicines, which treat or cure diseases, vaccines *prevent* them.

# What are the benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

- COVID-19 vaccination will help keep you from getting sick from COVID-19.
- All COVID-19 vaccines available in the U.S. have been shown to be very effective.
- Wearing masks and social distancing help lower your chance of getting the virus or spreading it to others, but these measures are not enough.
- The combination of getting vaccinated and following CDC's recommendations to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from COVID-19.
- The more people who get vaccinated, the faster we can get back to our normal lives.



# What vaccines are available?

- Three vaccines have received Emergency Use Authorization from the Food and Drug Administration from companies named Pfizer, Moderna, and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson, or J&J).
- All three COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective against serious illness, hospitalization, and death.
- The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require 2 doses given at least 3-4 weeks apart. People should get both doses to be fully vaccinated in order to be effective.
- Johnson & Johnson (J&J) is only 1 dose.



# How do we know if the vaccine is safe?

Vaccines go through more testing than any other pharmaceuticals:



Small groups of people receive the trial vaccine



The vaccine is given to specific groups of people (i.e by age, race, and physical health).



The vaccine is given tens of thousands of people and tested for effectiveness and safety.

# How do we know if the vaccine is safe?

4.



The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices looks at the data to see if the vaccine is safe and works. They give advice to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

5.



The FDA looks at the data and the advice from the Advisory Committee and decides whether to approve the vaccine.

The vaccine is only approved after **all of these steps** are done and various teams of reviewers are sure that it works and is safe.

# What about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine?

The pause of the J&J vaccine was an example of safety monitoring in action.

1.



On April 13, the FDA and CDC **paused** use of the J&J vaccine because 6 people developed a rare blood clot soon after getting the vaccine.

3.



On April 23, the FDA and CDC decided it was safe to start using the J&J vaccine again, and that its **very large benefits** outweigh its **very small risk**.

2.



Scientists **studied the data** about these blood clots, who was likely to develop them, and what might have caused them.

4.



FDA and CDC will continue to take side effect reports seriously and **investigate severe reports**.



# How is it safe if it happened so fast?

The timeline was sped up but never cut corners on safety. Here is how:



**We already had helpful information** about coronaviruses, so we weren't starting from scratch.



The U.S. and other governments **invested a lot of money** to support vaccine companies with their work.



A lot of people participated in clinical trials and **we didn't need to spend time finding volunteers.**



Manufacturing happened **at the same time as safety studies**, so vaccines were ready to be distributed once they were approved.

## Example COVID-19 vaccine timeline:



## Traditional timeline:



# Can I get COVID-19 from the COVID-19 vaccines?

No. The vaccines do not contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. This means that you can't catch COVID-19 from the vaccine.



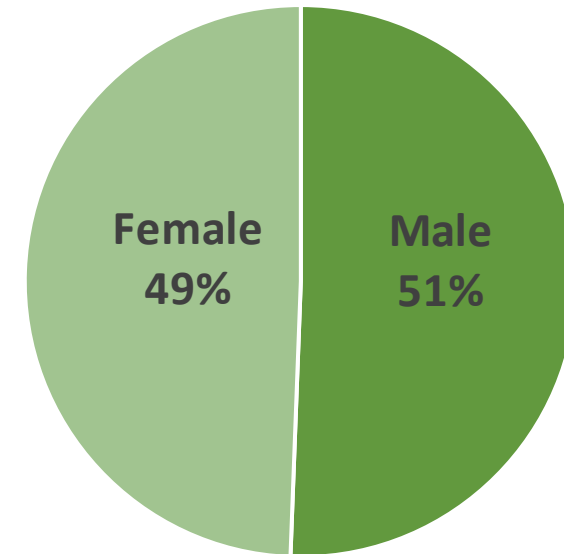
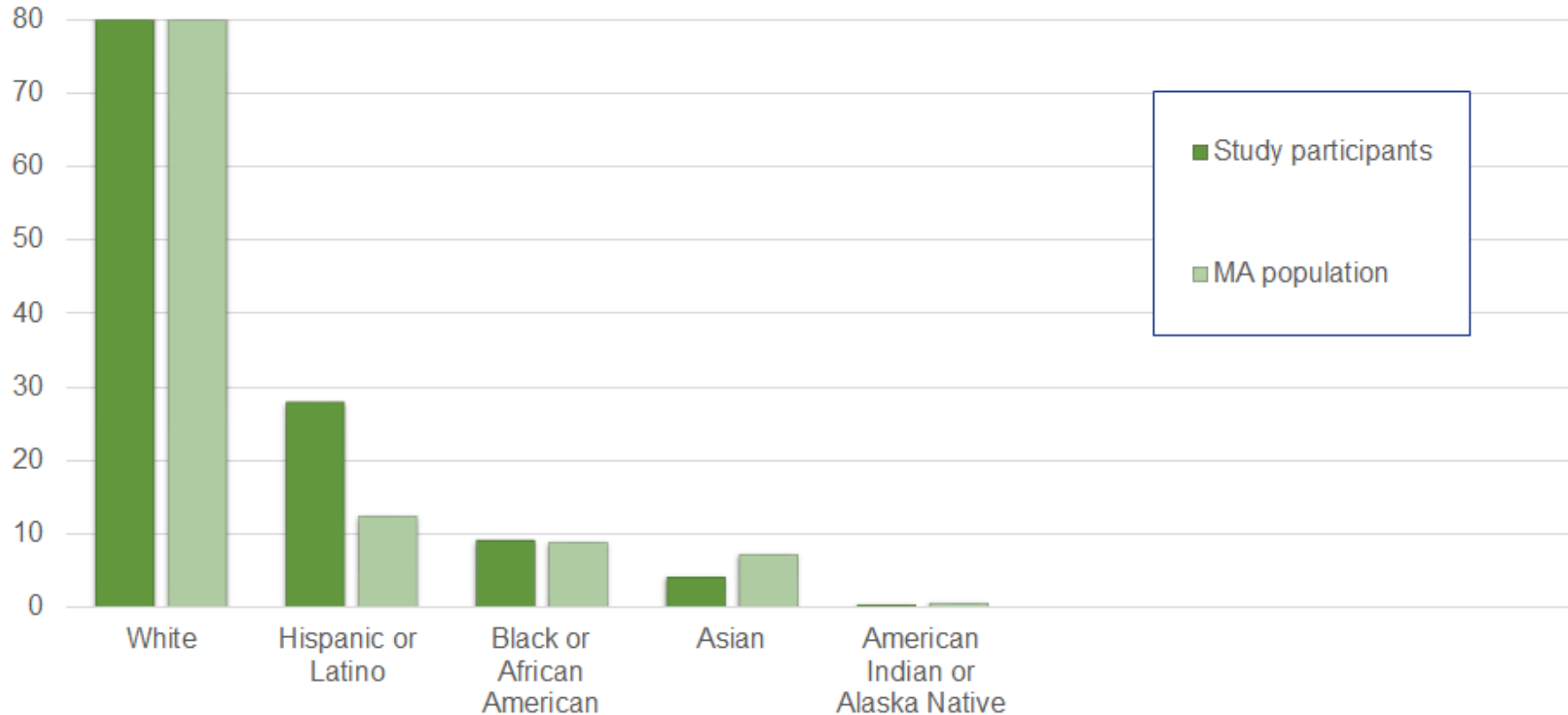
# Do the COVID-19 vaccines have any side effects?

- Serious side effects from vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine, are rare.
- It is possible that some people may have side effects, which are normal signs that your body is building protection.
- These side effects may affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days.
- The most common side effects are minor and include:
  - Tiredness
  - Headache
  - Pain at the injection site
  - Muscle and/or joint pain
  - Chills
  - Nausea and/or vomiting
  - Fever



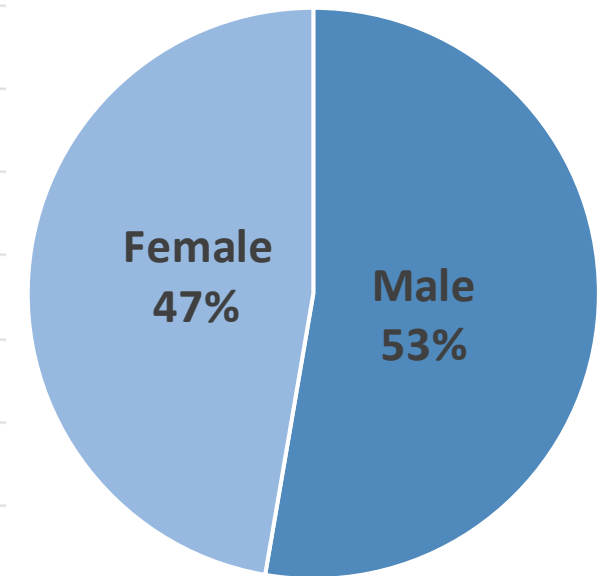
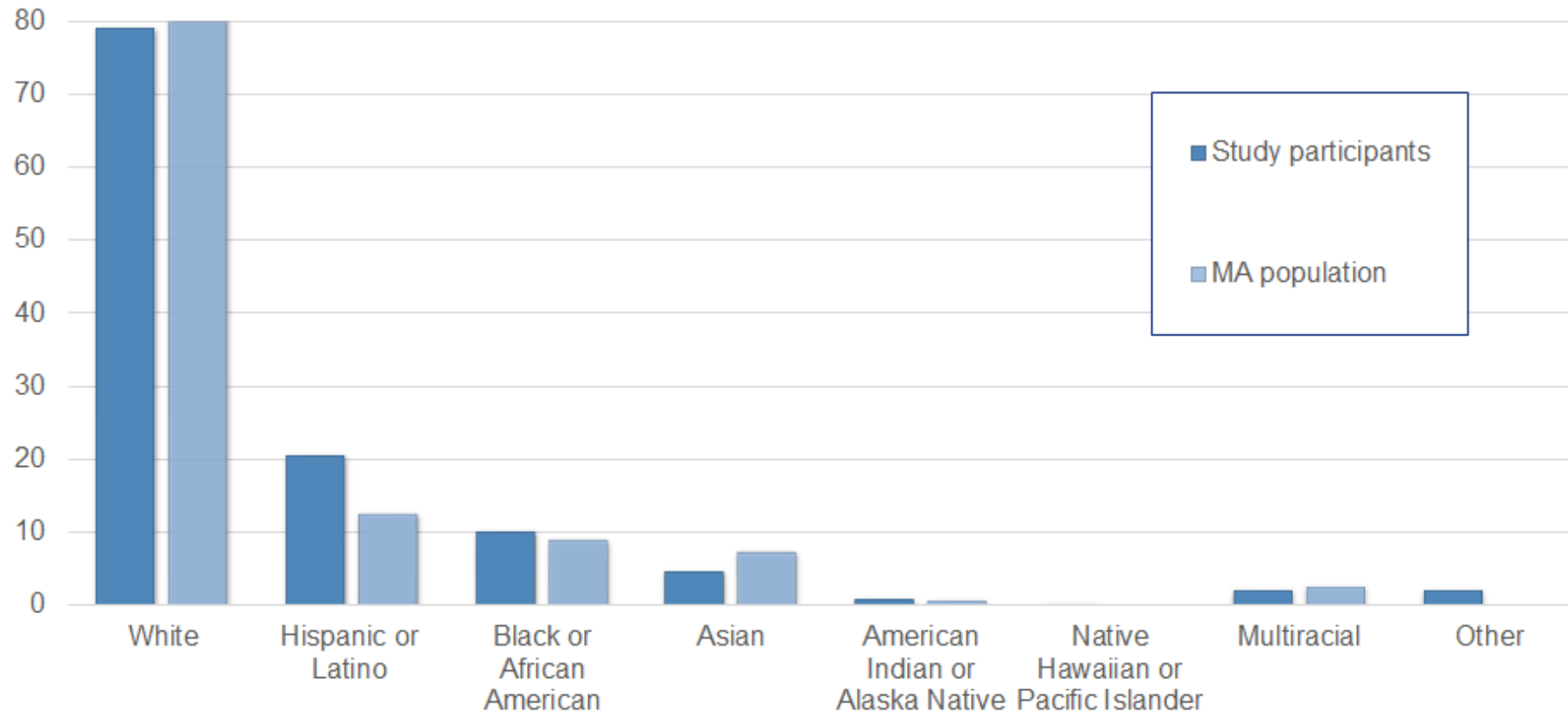
# Who was the Pfizer vaccine tested on?

The safety of the **Pfizer** vaccine was evaluated in 43,448 people 16 years of age and older in two clinical studies conducted in the United States, Europe, Turkey, South Africa, and South America.



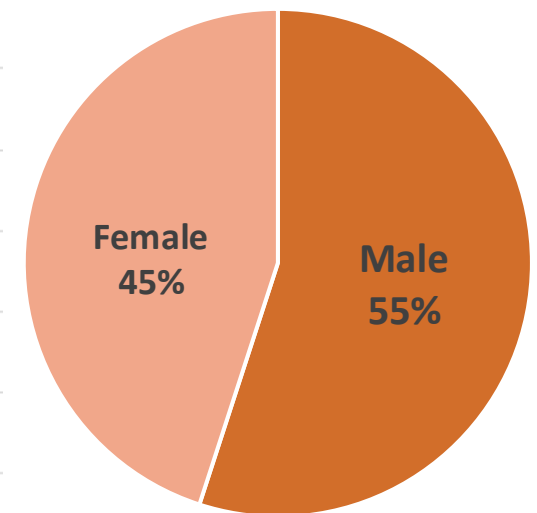
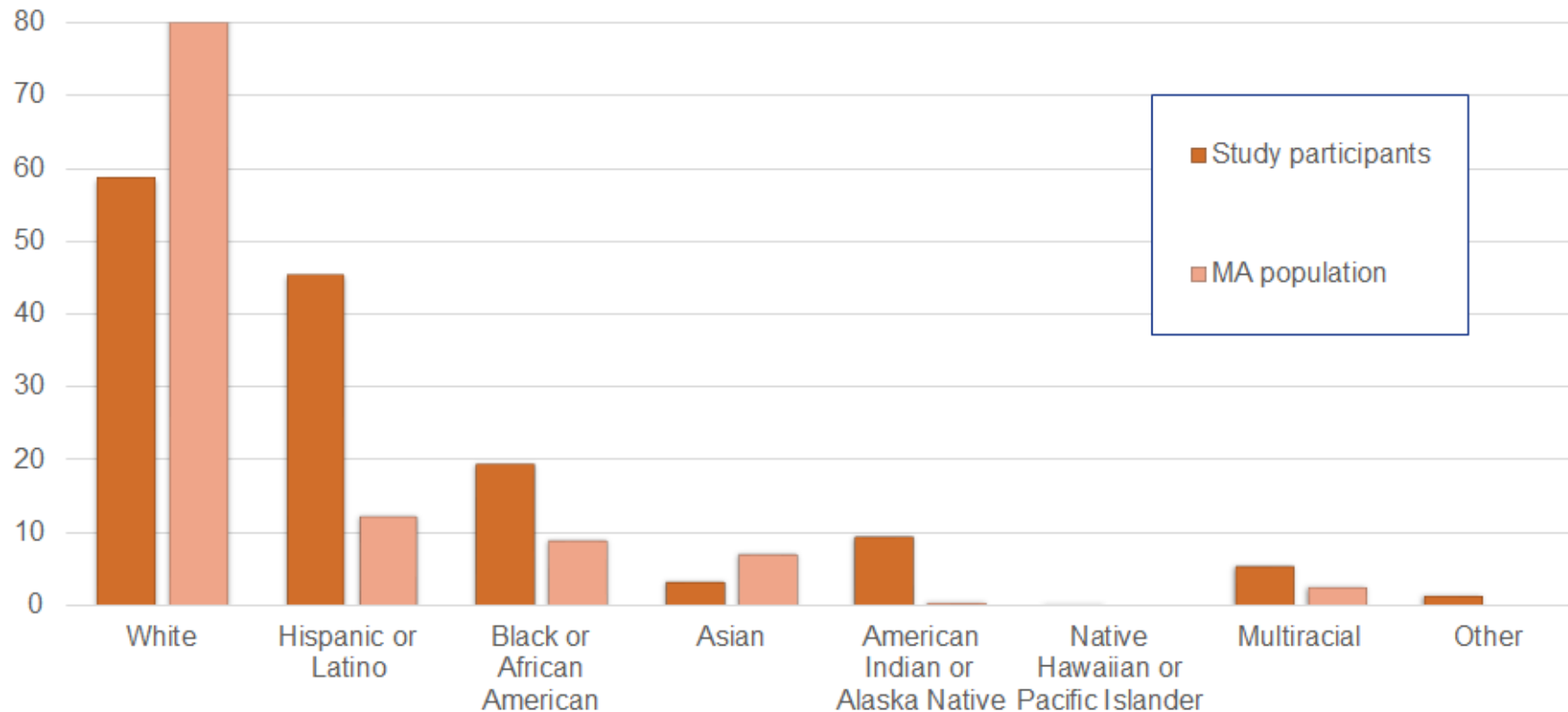
# Who was the Moderna vaccine tested on?

The safety of the **Moderna** vaccine was evaluated in 30,351 people 18 years of age and older in the United States.



# Who was the Johnson & Johnson vaccine tested on?

The safety of the **Janssen (Johnson & Johnson)** vaccine was evaluated in 43,783 people 18 years and older in the U.S., Brazil, South Africa, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Chile, and Mexico



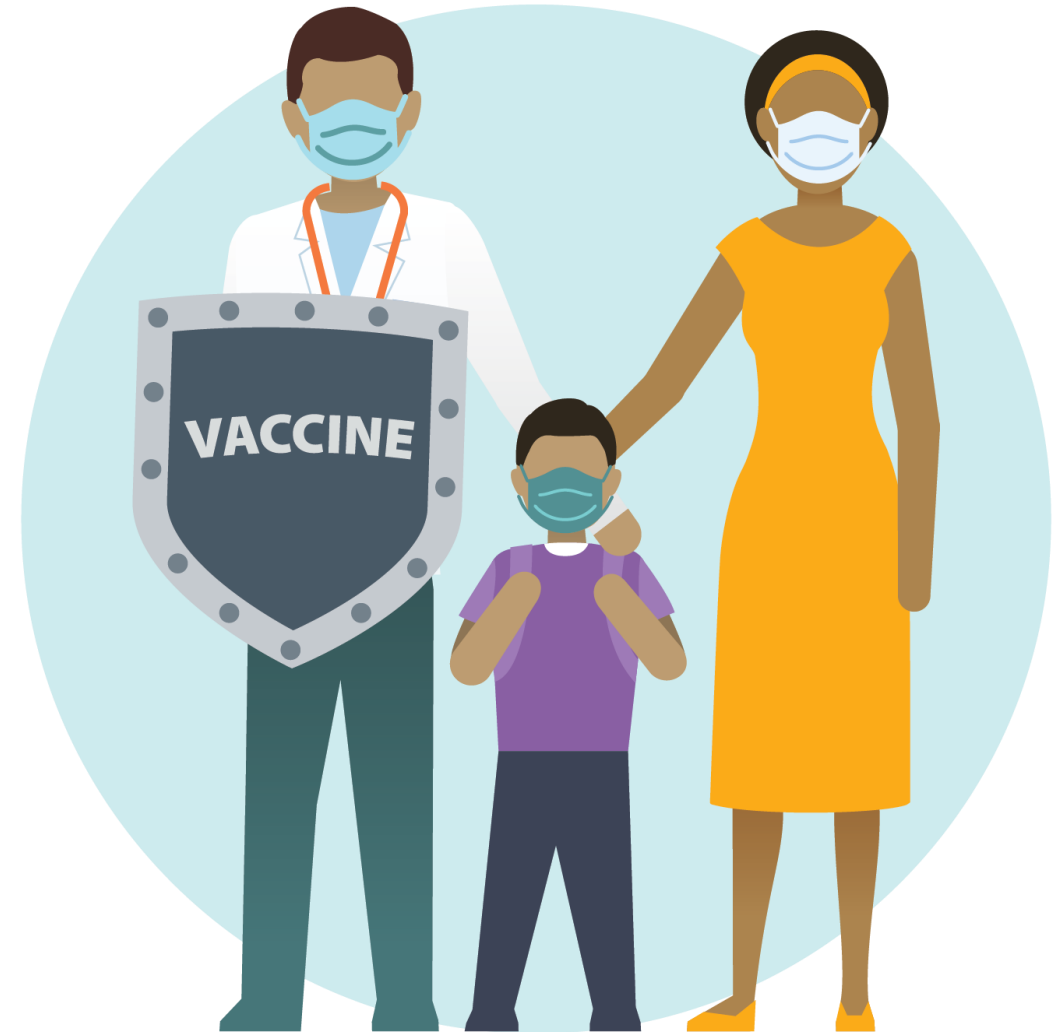
# Should someone with allergies get the COVID-19 vaccine?

- You should **not** get the COVID-19 vaccines if you have a history of severe allergic reaction (also called “anaphylaxis”) to any ingredient in the vaccine.
- The vaccines do not contain eggs, gelatin, preservatives, or latex. The ingredient lists can be found at:
  - Pfizer: <https://www.fda.gov/media/144414/download> (page 2)
  - Moderna: <https://www.fda.gov/media/144638/download> (page 2)
  - Janssen (Johnson & Johnson): <https://www.fda.gov/media/146305/download> (page 2)
- If you have a history of a severe allergic reaction to something else that’s not in the vaccine (like peanut butter), discuss with your health care provider before receiving the vaccine.



# I would like to have a baby one day. Is it safe for me to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

- Yes. People who are trying to become pregnant now or who plan to try in the future may receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available to them.
- Based on what we know right now, experts believe that COVID-19 vaccines are safe for someone who is trying to become pregnant in the short or long term.
- There is no evidence that fertility problems are a side effect of any vaccine.



# Can someone who is pregnant or breastfeeding get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes.

- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that COVID-19 vaccines be offered to pregnant and breastfeeding individuals.
- Right now, we don't have much data about whether the COVID-19 vaccines are safe in people who are pregnant or breastfeeding. So far, scientists haven't found any safety concerns for pregnant people who were vaccinated, or for their babies.
- We do know that getting sick with COVID-19 during pregnancy can increase the risk of severe illness and might increase the risk of outcomes like preterm birth.
- Getting vaccinated is a personal choice for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding. A discussion with your healthcare provider might help you feel comfortable, but you aren't required to get their approval before getting vaccinated.

# Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe for children?

- The Pfizer vaccine is authorized for people ages 12 and older.
- The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are authorized for people ages 18 and older.
- Younger children and adolescents should not get the COVID-19 vaccine right now.



# Will a COVID-19 vaccine change my DNA?

- No. COVID-19 vaccines do not change or interact with your DNA in any way.
- Vaccines teach our immune system how to fight against a specific virus.
- In order to do its job, the COVID-19 vaccine doesn't need to go inside the nucleus of the cell, which is where our DNA is kept. This means the vaccine never interacts with our DNA in any way and has no way to change it.

# Who has received the vaccine so far?

- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health posts online a weekly vaccination report that shows information such as:
  - Number of doses of vaccine shipped to Massachusetts
  - Number of people who have been vaccinated;
  - Number of people who have been vaccinated **by county**
  - Number of people who have been vaccinated by **age and race/ethnicity**
  - Vaccines given by different types of providers (e.g. school, community health center)
- The latest numbers can be found at [COVID-19 Vaccination Program | Mass.gov](#)

# How do I make an appointment?

- Preregister at [VaccineSignUp.mass.gov](https://VaccineSignUp.mass.gov) to be contacted when there is an appointment at a mass vaccination or regional collaborative location.
- Use [VaxFinder.mass.gov](https://VaxFinder.mass.gov) to search for appointments at pharmacies, health care providers, and other community locations.
  - 6 mass vaccination locations also have walk up appointments.
- People who **can't use the internet** may call the Massachusetts Vaccine Scheduling Resource Line: **2-1-1 (877-211-6277)**



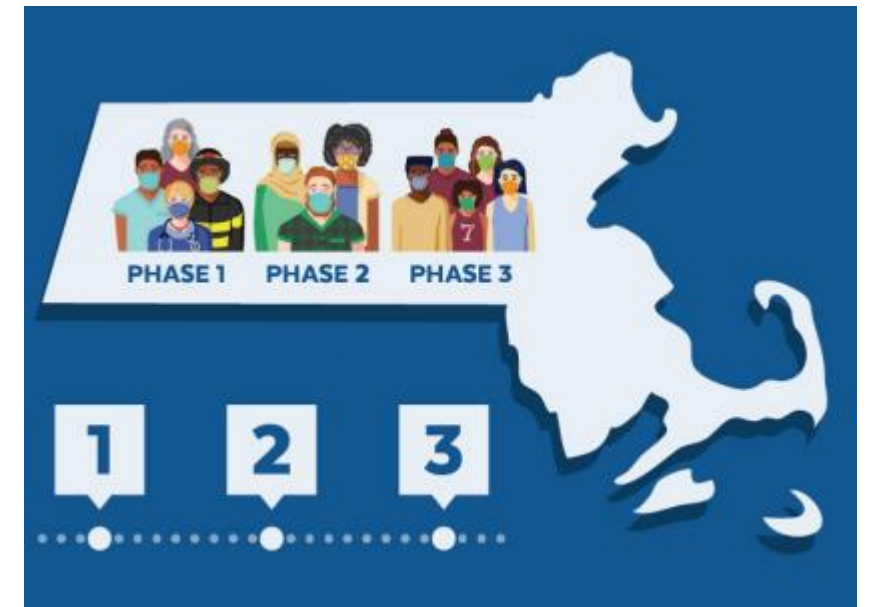
# COVID-19 Employer Vaccination Program

- Option 1: Group appointments at mass vaccination locations
- Option 2: Mobile on-site employer vaccination clinic

More info: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-employer-vaccination-program>

# What if I need help getting to or around a vaccination site?

- MassHealth provides free transportation to vaccine appointments to anyone with MassHealth or the Health Safety Net.
  - You can call your health plan or MassHealth directly at 800-841-2900 to schedule free transportation
- All mass vaccination locations are wheelchair accessible and do not require people to use stairs.
- Many mass vaccination sites have a drop off area and provide mobility assistance.





# Will I have to pay for the vaccine?

- No. The vaccine is **free** for all Massachusetts residents.
  - You will never be asked for a credit card number to make an appointment.
  - You can get a vaccine even if you do not have insurance, a driver's license, or a Social Security number.



# Will getting the vaccine impact a person's immigration status?

- No. Getting the vaccine will not change whether you are able to stay in the US, get a green card, or get public benefits like housing or SNAP.
- **No matter what your immigration status**, it is important for you and your family to be safe from COVID-19.
- You can get a vaccine even if you do not have insurance, a driver's license, or a Social Security number.

# What should I do if I experience symptoms after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine?

- If you have a lot of pain or discomfort, talk to your healthcare provider.
- If you do not have a healthcare provider or want to report any side effects to the CDC, visit **[cdc.gov/vsafe](https://www.cdc.gov/vsafe)**
- You can use v-safe on a smartphone to quickly tell CDC if you have any side effects after getting the COVID-19 vaccine and to get personalized health check-ins after you receive a COVID-19 vaccination.



# How long after getting the COVID-19 vaccine does it take to be effective? How long does it last?

- It usually takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination.
- That means it's possible a person could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination and get sick. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection.
- We do not know yet how long the COVID-19 vaccines will provide protection.
- Experts continue to conduct more studies about whether the vaccines also keep people from spreading COVID-19.

# Do I need to keep wearing a mask if I am fully vaccinated?

Yes. Until more people are vaccinated, some prevention measures will continue to be necessary, even for people who have been fully vaccinated.

- Continue wearing a mask and avoiding close contact with others in public.
- You may visit other people who are fully vaccinated but take precautions when visiting people who have *not* been vaccinated.
- Stay home and get tested if you feel sick.
- Isolate if you test positive for COVID-19.



**Wash your hands**



**Wear a mask**



**Keep your distance**



**Avoid groups**

# Who can help me make decisions about getting the vaccine?

If you have more questions about your own health or about deciding to get the vaccine, talk to a trusted healthcare provider, like your doctor, nurse, insurance care manager, pharmacist, or community health worker.



# Where to learn more

Latest Massachusetts COVID-19 Vaccination Plan update

[COVID-19 Vaccination Program | Mass.gov](#)

FAQs for the general public

[COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions | Mass.gov](#)

Vaccine Equity

[COVID-19 Vaccine Equity Initiative | Mass.gov](#)

COVID-19 Vaccine information from CDC

[COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](#)

For other questions related to COVID-19 vaccine in Massachusetts, please email:

[COVID-19-Vaccine-Plan-MA@mass.gov](mailto:COVID-19-Vaccine-Plan-MA@mass.gov)

# Tools and resources

Flyers and social media graphics in multiple languages

[Stop COVID-19 – Vaccine graphics | Mass.gov](#)

Trust the Facts, Get the Vax Campaign Materials, **including videos**

[Trust the Facts, Get the Vax Campaign Materials | Mass.gov](#)

COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Toolkit for **Community-Based Organizations**

[COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Toolkit for Community-Based Organizations: Getting Started | CDC](#)

Fact sheets on topics such as mask wearing, social distancing, and stopping the spread of germs

[COVID-19 Printable Fact Sheets | Mass.gov](#)



# Examples of other questions in the FAQ for the general public

## [COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions | Mass.gov](#)

- Should someone who is COVID-19-positive receive the vaccine?
- Should someone who has had COVID-19 be vaccinated?
- How will vaccines work against COVID-19 variants, like the one that appeared in the United Kingdom?
- What can I expect at my appointment to get vaccinated for COVID-19?
- Can I choose which vaccine I receive?
- Will people who live in another state or country part time (e.g. students, retirees, people with dual citizenship) be able to get the COVID-19 vaccine in Massachusetts?

# Discussion questions

- What concerns do **you** have regarding the COVID vaccine?
  - What concerns do **people in your community** have regarding the COVID vaccine?
- What information would help **you** trust the vaccine?
  - What information would help **people in your community** trust the vaccine?
- What would make **you** more likely to get the vaccine?
  - What would make **people in your community** more likely to get the vaccine?
- What barriers make it harder for **you** to get the COVID vaccine (for example, location, time off from work, needing two doses)?
  - What are the things that might make it harder for **people in your community** to get the COVID vaccine?
- How can we make it easier for **you** to get the vaccine?
  - How can we make it easier for **people in your community** to get the vaccine?