Have questions about COVID-19 shots for children & teens?
(under 18)

Visit vaccinate.wv.gov to view FAQs and to use the WV COVID-19 Vaccination Due Date Calculator to find out when you or your child/teen are due for a COVID-19 shot.

Note: While the information in this FAQ is current as of the listed date, guidelines are subject to change.

Updated October 13, 2023

WHAT IS THE 2023-2024 UPDATED COVID-19 SHOT, AND WHY IS IT NEEDED?

Coronavirus is an ever-changing health threat. Over time, we have gained understanding about the virus and COVID-19 disease prevention in children and teens. The 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 shots were adapted to provide updated protection against the newer virus strains circulating in our communities. Immunity can decrease over time, and an updated COVID-19 shot reminds our bodies how to recognize the virus and identify new strains so we can protect loved ones from the most serious COVID complications.

If you do get COVID-19, being up-to-date on vaccination prior to getting the virus reduces risk of severe complications, hospitalization, or even death from COVID. Getting an updated COVID-19 shot may also lower the risk of developing long COVID (i.e., extended health problems after even a mild COVID infection).

Vaccination is especially important in the fall and winter, when respiratory diseases often spread in high volume. West Virginians ages 6 months and up are recommended to stay up-to-date on COVID-19 shots. *(Please see page 2 for more details about specific vaccine eligibility.)*

WHAT IS COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an illness caused by a virus spreading around the world and locally. The virus spreads mainly through droplets made when an infected person exhales or speaks, and especially when they yell, sing, cough, or sneeze. People with COVID-19 can have a range of symptoms, from mild sickness to extreme illness that needs hospital treatment or worse. Some otherwise healthy people can get very sick, with symptoms lasting months or years (often called "post-COVID conditions" or "long COVID").

ARE CHILDREN AND TEENS AT RISK FOR COVID-19?

Yes. Millions of children have gotten COVID-19, a leading cause of pediatric death. Tens of thousands of kids have been hospitalized due to COVID-19 disease, and many had no known pre-existing conditions. Each body reacts differently to the virus, and it can be different with each infection. COVID can have long-term health consequences, even from mild cases. Some otherwise healthy kids can have symptoms that last months or years (called "long COVID"). Although older adults and people with underlying health conditions have more risk for severe COVID-19, children and teens can also be severely affected.

ARE KIDS RECOMMENDED TO GET COVID-19 SHOTS?

Yes. West Virginia children and teens ages 6 months and older are recommended to stay up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccination.

For the best protection against the virus that causes COVID-19, now everyone ages 6 months and older is eligible for at least one 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 shot. To be considered up-to-date:

- **Children ages 6 months through 4 years** should get at least one 2023-2024 updated Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 shot as part of their recommended COVID-19 vaccination series.
  - Those who have not previously received any COVID-19 shots should get two or three doses of updated COVID-19 vaccine depending on which vaccine they receive.
  - For those who completed an initial series already, one 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 shot will ensure they are up-to-date.
- Most individuals **ages 5 years and older*** are recommended to get one 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 shot, regardless of whether they received any previous COVID-19 shot(s).

- Novavax COVID-19 vaccine is only available for ages 12 years and older. Those **who have not** previously received any COVID-19 shot and choose **Novavax** for their COVID-19 vaccination need **two** Novavax 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 shots at least 3-8 weeks apart.

*Note: Those who are **moderately to severely immunocompromised** need multiple shots, including at least one 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 shot, and should consult with their healthcare provider about additional shots.

For recommendations for an individual child, talk to a healthcare provider.

Calculator

For a simplified way to find out when to get a COVID-19 shot, use the **WV COVID-19 Vaccination Due Date Calculator** by scrolling down at **vaccinate.wv.gov**.

The calculator is a free, online tool to quickly help most people figure out when they are due for a COVID-19 shot, including for those immunocompromised.

West Virginians can also call the WV COVID-19 Vaccine Info Line at 1-833-734-0965 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm) to learn when they are due.

- What it means to be "up-to-date" on COVID-19 shots: **https://bit.ly/C19CDCUpToDate**
- General COVID-19 vaccine eligibility: **https://bit.ly/C19Vax4SpecificPpl**
- COVID-19 vaccination for those who are immunocompromised: **https://bit.ly/C19AddlDose**
- Medications that cause a person to be considered immunocompromised: **https://bit.ly/ModSevImmunocomp**

WHICH CHILDREN/TEENS UNDER AGE 18 SHOULD *NOT* GET A COVID-19 SHOT?

Few people should not be vaccinated. COVID-19 shots are not recommended for anyone with a severe or immediate allergic reaction to a vaccine ingredient or who had a serious allergic reaction to a COVID-19 shot (discuss with a healthcare provider). COVID-19 shots are also not currently recommended for children under age 6 months. Click here to learn more: https://bit.ly/C19VaccineInfoKids

ARE COVID-19 SHOTS FREE?

Most children and teens can get a COVID-19 shot for free. For those with health insurance, most plans will cover COVID-19 shots at no cost (you may need to use an in-network provider as you do for other health care). Children and teens eligible for the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program may get the shot from a VFC provider (see VFC information below).

WHERE CAN CHILDREN/TEENS GET A COVID-19 SHOT?

Children and teens may be able to get their 2023-2024 updated COVID-19 shot(s) at healthcare providers' offices, community health centers, local health departments, or pharmacies that provide COVID-19 immunization (pharmacies can vaccinate ages 3 years and older).

It is advised to contact your intended vaccination location to ensure they carry the COVID-19 shot that your child/teen is eligible for and they accept the child's healthcare coverage or health insurance.

Most health insurance plans cover COVID-19 vaccination (they could require using an in-network provider, as with other care). **Children eligible for the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program** (which provides vaccines for children 18 years and younger who are uninsured, underinsured, Medicaid-eligible, American Indian, or Alaska Native) **may be able to get the shot from a VFC provider**. To find a VFC provider in your area, contact your child's healthcare provider or your local health department (find your local health department by county here: https://bit.ly/WVHealthDeptByCty).

Contact a healthcare provider to see if they carry the COVID-19 vaccine and accept your child's insurance/coverage, visit vaccinate.wv.gov for more information about vaccination locations, or call the WV COVID-19 Vaccine Info Line at 1-833-734-0965 (Monday through Friday 9 am to 5 pm). Call the Info Line for vaccination arrangements for someone who is homebound. If you have a COVID-19 Vaccination Card bring this card with you to any other COVID-19 immunization appointments.

SHOULD A KID WHO GOT COVID-19 AND RECOVERED GET A COVID-19 SHOT?

Yes. Immunity from having COVID-19 can wear off, and previous infection does **not** give adequate protection against new variants. Even children who had minimal or no symptoms with prior COVID could get severe disease with another infection. Children who currently have COVID-19 may get vaccinated after their isolation period. Those who recently had COVID may consider delaying COVID-19 vaccination by 3 months from infection but should consider their disease risk factors and discuss with a healthcare provider.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO GET/GIVE COVID-19 TO OTHERS BY GETTING VACCINATED?

No. It is impossible for COVID-19 vaccines to infect anyone with the virus that causes COVID-19.

HOW DO COVID-19 SHOTS WORK?

COVID-19 vaccines work by helping the body's immune system build antibodies to recognize and fight the virus. COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna) are made of sugar, salts, lipids (fats), and messenger RNA (mRNA). The mRNA is used to make protein, which teaches our cells how to recognize the virus. The mRNA breaks down and goes away quickly, leaving in its place the blueprint for protection. Protein subunit vaccines (e.g., Novavax) package proteins alongside an adjuvant that helps the immune system respond to the virus in the future. Protein subunit vaccines have been used for more than 30 years in the United States, such as for flu and whooping cough.

IS IT OK TO GET A COVID-19 SHOT WHEN GETTING OTHER SHOTS?

Yes. COVID-19 shots can be received at and around the same time as other routine vaccines, such as the flu shot. There are additional considerations for some people receiving Mpox (orthopoxvirus) and COVID-19 vaccination simultaneously; talk to a healthcare provider.

ARE COVID-19 SHOTS EFFECTIVE?

Yes. Vaccination is effective at preventing kids from getting really sick, needing to stay in the hospital, or even dying if they get COVID. Keeping up-to-date with vaccination is the best protection against more recent variants (variants are new strains that happen when a virus is able to spread and mutate). Even if you do test positive for COVID, being up-to-date on your COVID-19 shots means you're far less likely to get very sick, need hospital care, or die from the disease. Studies have continued to show that COVID-19 vaccination makes it far less likely that children and teens ages 6 months and older will be hospitalized because of COVID-19.

ARE THE COVID-19 SHOTS SAFE?

Yes. Rigorous clinical trials found COVID-19 vaccination is safe and effective for children/teens ages 6+ months. COVID-19 vaccines have the most robust safety monitoring in history: https://bit.ly/CovVaxSafety

ARE THERE COVID-19 VACCINATION SIDE EFFECTS?

Sometimes. Some children and teens have mild side effects after vaccination, and others do not have any. The known risks of COVID-19 disease and its complications far outweigh potential risks of having a rare adverse reaction to vaccination.

Side effects are often short-lived and a sign the body is building immunity. Common responses are pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site. Some also feel tired, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever, or nausea. In very rare cases, myocarditis/pericarditis (inflammation in and around the heart) has been reported after COVID-19 vaccination, particularly among male teens and young adults. Risk of myopericarditis after getting a COVID-19 vaccine is lower than the risk of myopericarditis from getting COVID-19 disease. Click here to learn more: https://bit.ly/MyoPericarditisC19Vax

ARE COVID-19 SHOTS SAFE FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO BECOME PREGNANT?

Yes. People who want to become pregnant now, or in the future, are recommended to get vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccines are safe, and many West Virginians have gone on to get pregnant after vaccination.

LOOKING FOR MORE INFO ABOUT COVID-19 & COVID-19 VACCINES?

- West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources: **vaccinate.wv.gov**
- CDC: **www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines**
- United States Government General COVID-19 Guidance: **COVID.gov**
- American Academy of Pediatrics: **healthychildren.org**

Note: This FAQ is current as of 10/9/23. Guidelines may change. More on CDC guidance: https://bit.ly/CDCc19vaxMain