

Everything you wanted to know about the COVID-19 vaccines

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Dr. Ronald Blanton, chair of the Department of Tropical Medicine (Photo by Sally Asher)

Dr. Ronald Blanton, chair of the Department of Tropical Medicine and William G. Vincent Professor of Tropical Medicine at the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, answers common vaccine questions.

Q: “Once I get vaccinated, do I still have to wear a mask?”

Yes. It is still not clear whether vaccinated or infected and recovered individuals can

still transmit the virus. This is being studied and we should find out soon, but for now, for the good of unvaccinated neighbors and strangers, everyone, regardless of vaccination status, should mask. I should also mention that 95% effective (rate) for the vaccine means that 5% of people were still infected.

Q: “I don’t want to have to get two shots. Would the first shot of the vaccine offer enough protection?”

The evidence is that a single shot confers some protection after several weeks, but this is still less than with two shots, and the duration of the protection from one shot is not known. Get both shots.

Q: “I want to be vaccinated. Where do I start?”

This is still one of the tough questions, and the landscape should be changing with the new federal administration. This currently depends on who you are. For instance, if you are 70 or over in the state of Louisiana, you are eligible, as are workers in health care. If you are a patient or ever were a patient at certain outpatient clinics, you can get on a list at those institutions. Others in the 1B group can get on lists with Walgreens or CVS by report, but you must call ahead. See the [state website](#) for a more detailed description. The Department of Health is tooling up to provide Points of Delivery (PODs), where vaccines will be more generally offered to the public in the qualifying groups.

Q: “Are the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines different? Can I choose which one I want?”

They are very similar in composition, but their storage and administration differ. Pfizer needs to be stored at -112 degrees F and can be thawed and used within 6 hours. The second dose should be given after 21 days.

The Moderna can be stored between 36 degrees F and 46 degrees F for up to 30 days. The second dose should be given after 28 days. Do not choose. Get whatever approved vaccine is offered to you. The efficacy and safety profiles are similar. I suspect this will be my advice as more vaccines come online.

Q: “I already had COVID-19, do I still need a vaccine?”

Yes. The duration of natural protection is unclear. The vaccines thus far also appear to stimulate a higher level of protection. Vaccination is recommended for everyone, even if previously infected. Vaccination in this group, however, should happen more than 90 days after recovery from infection. No increased risk of side effects has

been shown as yet, but the response to the previous infection may inhibit response to the vaccine.

Q: “I want to see my grandkids! How long after the vaccine do I have to wait?”

I hear this a lot. The vaccinee is protected but has still the potential to transmit the virus. In a few months, we hope that most of the population will be vaccinated, and the issue will be moot. See if you can wait a bit longer.