

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the COVID-19 Vaccine

**Q: Who is getting the vaccines now in Merced County? Who is next to get it?**

A: Merced County is currently in phase 1a. During Phase 1a, vaccines are only available to healthcare workers and residents in long-term care settings due to limited supplies.

The next phase, phase 1B, includes individuals 75 and older, those at risk of exposure at work in the following sectors: education, childcare, and emergency services (such as law enforcement and firefighters).

During Phase 2, vaccines will be available for

- all older adults not included in Phase 1,
- all other critical infrastructure workers not covered in Phase 1, and
- people with high-risk conditions

During Phase 3, vaccines will be available to:

- all workers in high-risk exposure settings not covered in previous phases and
- children (if it is safe for them)

Lastly, Phase 4 will include

- everyone residing in Merced County who did not receive the vaccine in previous phases

Merced County Department of Public Health is working diligently to create equitable access to vaccines for our community. We thank the community for doing its part, following the guidelines advised by the state. Together we can end this pandemic.

**Q: How many COVID-19 vaccines has Merced County received?**

A: On December 17<sup>th</sup> 2020, The Merced County Department of Public Health (Department) received 975 doses of the COVID-19 Pfizer vaccine from the State. The Department has been allocating vaccine to local medical providers that have registered with the State's vaccination program and will continue to follow the state's guidelines for vaccine distribution.

As established by the State, each county received their respective allocation of the Pfizer vaccine doses, this amount varies throughout each county. Vaccine delivery is shipped by companies such as UPS and FedEx. The Merced County Department of Public Health (Department) doesn't receive all the vaccines directly; in fact, the total amount of doses for the county does not include the amount of vaccines distributed to prisons, hospitals, or allocation for individuals receiving their second COVID-19 vaccine dose.

For more information on vaccine distribution and current phase, in Merced County, visit: <https://www.co.merced.ca.us/3350/Coronavirus-Disease-2019>

**Q: When can I get the vaccine?**

A: Vaccine supply is limited and distribution is taking place in 4 phases. The state's current timeline projects that vaccine will become available to the general population in the 4th phase projected to happen in or around spring/summer 2021. The Department will be putting out frequent communication to keep residents advised of vaccine plans as the County moves through the different phases of distribution.

**Q: What if I already had COVID-19 and have recovered; do I still need to get vaccinated?**

A: Yes, there is not enough information currently available to say if or for how long after infection someone is protected from getting COVID-19 again; this is called natural immunity. Early evidence suggests natural immunity from COVID-19 may not last very long, but more studies are needed to better understand this.

**Q: Once the vaccine is available for the public, who should get vaccinated?**

A: Per the CDC guidelines, the Pfizer- BioNTech vaccine is recommended for people aged 16 years and older.

The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for individuals 18 years of age and older.

Recommendation for vaccination varies based on manufacturer.

Both vaccines have been authorized for emergency use, by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), to prevent COVID-19 in individuals.

**Q: Is there any guidance as to who should not be vaccinated?**

Per the CDC guidelines, you should not get the Pfizer-BioNTech nor Moderna COVID-19 vaccine if you: had a severe allergic reaction after a previous dose of this vaccine and/or had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient of this vaccine. An immediate allergic reaction means a reaction within 4 hours of getting vaccinated, including symptoms such as hives, swelling or wheezing (respiratory distress). The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine does not contain eggs, preservatives, and/or latex. Please consult with your doctor for guidance to help you decide if it is safe for you to be vaccinated.

For more information on the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/Moderna.html>

For more information on the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/Pfizer-BioNTech.html>

**Q: Are there any side effects after receiving the vaccine? How does it have an impact to the body?**

A: Common side effects may include

- pain or aches,
- swelling,
- redness, and/or

- a sore arm where you got the shot.

Throughout the rest of your body, you may experience:

- chills,
- tiredness
- headaches, and/or
- a fever

Please remember that side effects may feel like the flu and may affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. It is important to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, once you are able to receive it. Vaccination will help protect you from getting COVID.

After vaccination, you will be provided with information on how to report any symptoms or side effects after getting the COVID-19 vaccine. Depending on your answers, someone from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) may call to check on you and get more information. The **V-safe**, smartphone tool, will also remind you to get your second COVID-19 vaccine dose if you need one.

***Q: Why do I need to receive two shots?***

A: With most COVID-19 vaccines, you need two shots in order for them to work. Please remember to get the second shot, even if you have side effects after the first shot, unless a vaccination provider or your doctor tells you not to get a second shot. Both vaccines require two doses to be effective.

- The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is administered as a 2-dose series, 3 weeks apart
- The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine is administered as a 2-dose series, 1 month apart

For second dose reminders, you can also sign-up with V-safe, a smartphone tool, that can remind you to get your second COVID-19 vaccine doses (if needed). You can also take a picture of the vaccine card, that will be provided to you, with your phone to help remind yourself to return to your provider to receive the second COVID-19 vaccine dose.

***Q: How much will the vaccine cost?***

There is no cost associated with receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. However, vaccination providers will be able to charge an administration fee for giving the shot to someone. Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund.

***Q: Are undocumented individuals going to be eligible to receive the vaccine?***

A: Yes. On March 14, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) updated their website to make clear that seeking "testing, treatment, nor preventative care (including vaccines, if a vaccine becomes available) related to COVID-19" will not be considered as part of the public charge analysis. <https://www.uscis.gov/greencard/public-charge>

***Q: Do I still have to wear a mask after I receive the COVID-19 vaccine? If so, why?***

Yes, experts are trying to learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, so it will be important for everyone to continue using all the tools available to us to help stop this pandemic.

It is important to continue:

- Covering your mouth and nose with a mask
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces
- Practicing social distancing
- Washing your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds
- Using hand sanitizer with 60 percent alcohol base when handwashing is not possible
- Staying home and isolating, if you are feeling sick

***Q: Will my workplace allow me to receive time off to recover and take the vaccine?***

Please contact your workplace human resource center, as every workplace has their own policy.

***Q: Should I get the vaccine even though there's a new coronavirus strain? Would it still work?***

Scientists are working to learn more about these variants to better understand how easily they might be transmitted and whether currently authorized vaccines will protect people against them.

Yes, the current COVID-19 vaccine would still work. Currently, there is no evidence that these variants cause more severe illness or increased risk of death.

***Q: Once I am eligible to get vaccinated, where do I go to get the vaccine?***

A: Initially vaccine supply will be very limited. At first, vaccines will be provided to healthcare workers and long-term care residents in accordance with the CDPH Allocation Guidelines.

Merced County Department of Public Health and its partners have plans in development of notifying the public when and how the vaccine is available to them. This includes traditional forms of public notification – news release, website and social media updates – as well as public service announcements; print, radio and TV ads, community-level outreach, direct mailers and other forms of outreach to ensure Merced County residents know when it's their time to receive vaccine.

Individuals should contact their local healthcare provider, pharmacy, or dentist to find out more about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

***Q: I'm over 60 and have underlying health conditions. When can I receive a COVID-19 vaccine?***

The California Department of Public Health has created allocation guidelines that provide strict and specific instructions on who is able to receive the vaccine. Initial vaccine supply will be very limited and only those in phase 1 are currently eligible to receive the vaccine. Phase 1b will include people 75 years and older, followed by all other older adults in Phase 2. Individuals should contact their local healthcare provider, pharmacy, or dentist to find out more about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

***Q: Is there a website or phone number where I can register to get on the list to receive the vaccine?***

Merced County Department of Public Health is not registering people on a list. Please see the previous question and answer.

***Q: When will each phase of the COVID-19 vaccine distribution begin?***

A: To find out more about when each phase of the vaccination distribution occurs, sign up for the Merced County Daily Status Updates at **[www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus](http://www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus)**.

You can also visit the CDC website for more information on the COVID-19 vaccine, visiting: **<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>**