RWDSU COVID-19 VACCINE FACT SHEET

MARCH 2021

There are currently **three** COVID-19 vaccines which have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to be distributed and administered in the United States. They are the **Pfizer-Biontech** vaccine, the **Moderna** vaccine, and the **Janssen Johnson & Johnson** vaccine. The CDC recommends that people get vaccinated with whichever vaccine is available to them.

Who should be vaccinated?

Everyone over the age of 16 should be vaccinated, unless they have a history of serious allergic reactions to the flu vaccine or if your healthcare provider has advised against it. Pfizer is approved for people 16 and over; Moderna and Janssen for people 18 and over. Currently, vaccines will not be given to children under the age of 16 because clinical trials conducted so far have focused on adults.

How do vaccines work?

The purpose of a vaccine is to introduce elements of a virus that trigger our bodies to produce proteins which build the antibodies to fight the virus if we are exposed to it. None of the COVID-19 vaccines available today contain live virus.

How will the vaccine be given?

Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses of the same vaccine. The time between the two doses varies: three weeks Pfizer and four weeks for Moderna. The Janssen vaccine is a single-dose vaccine. All three vaccines are administered on the arm.

Do you have to get the same COVID-19 vaccine or can you mix shots?

The COVID-19 vaccines are not interchangeable. The first and second dose must be from the same manufacturer if you are given Pfizer or Moderna. The Janssen vaccine is a single-shot and should not be mixed with another vaccine.

Are the vaccines safe?

Yes, the results so far are extremely good. Over one hundred thousand people were vaccinated and followed as part of the clinical trials and there have not been any serious incidents since their release for emergency use.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Some people will experience symptoms like soreness at the injection site, aches, or slight fever. If you experienced severe reactions from previous vaccinations, you should consult with a health care provider before getting the COVID vaccine. It is also recommended that before getting vaccinated you tell the vaccination provider if you have a fever or a bleeding disorder, are on a blood thinner, are immunocompromised, or take medicine that affects your immune system.

Should I report problems or bad reactions after getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. After vaccination, you will be monitored for 15-20 minutes at the vaccination center as a precaution. However, if you experience serious reactions at home, contact a health provider as soon as possible. A national system has been established to collect data on all adverse reactions (Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System: VAERS).

RWDSU Local 108 member Camille Yelverton was vaccinated along with other workers at Merakey long-term residential hospice in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. “I got my vaccine to protect myself, my family, and residents here at the facility. It’s important to get the shot!” she said.

More information: The Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) is a good source to get updated information on COVID-19 and the COVID vaccines.

For more information from the RWDSU Health and Safety Department, contact Jessica Garcia at: jgarcia@rwdsu.org or (212) 684-5300.

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Nancy Acosta, an RWDSU member at Mountain View Care Center in Scranton, Pennsylvania, said "I'm glad I got the vaccine. It's going to help keep myself and the people I care for on the job safe!"

Is the vaccine safe for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding?

The CDC, College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and other health organizations recommend that pregnant women get vaccinated. The fact that the vaccines do not contain live virus makes them safer than other vaccines. The risk of getting severe COVID disease is a much greater risk to health. If you have questions, speak with your healthcare provider.

Can I still get COVID-19 after I am vaccinated?

It is possible to become sick before or after vaccination, before the vaccine has created enough immunity. It typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination. All vaccines have shown to be extremely successful in preventing serious illness and hospitalization once your body builds immunity.

How long is the vaccine effective in protecting against COVID-19 infection?

We do not know at this time, as this is a new virus which we didn't know anything about until early 2020. Viruses usually mutate (change their structure and behavior) and new variations or strains can develop. New strains of the COVID-19 virus have appeared and studies are still determining the effectiveness of the vaccines if these strains become widespread in the United States.

Can we stop wearing face coverings once we have been vaccinated?

No. Stopping the pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines work with your immune system so that your body is better able to fight the virus if you are exposed. Face coverings help reduce the chance of being exposed to the virus and spreading it to others.

Is getting the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory?

No, no governmental agency is making vaccination mandatory. The federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) has stated that employers may require their employees get vaccinated in order to maintain employment. If you are faced with this issue, contact your union representative for assistance.

How do I get access to the vaccine?

Each state is setting up their own vaccine programs and guidelines. Vaccinations are likely to be available at medical centers, health clinics, drugstores and some workplaces. You may want to contact your union rep for more information to learn when you are eligible for vaccination.

What is the priority order for availability to get vaccinated?

Each state is establishing a priority system for vaccinating residents but most are following the recommendations of the CDC. The CDC recommends the following phase-in order for determining who should be vaccinated first. They are: (1a) healthcare workers and long- term care facility residents; (1b) frontline essential workers and people aged 75 and older; (1c) people aged 65-74, people aged 16-64 with underlying medical conditions, and other essential workers such as food service, housing, public safety, and high-risk factor seniors. The availability of vaccines will be dependent on when and how many vaccines each state receives. All vaccines are free to everyone.

More information: The Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) is a good source to get updated information on COVID-19 and the COVID vaccines. **For more information from the RWDSU Health and Safety Department**, contact Jessica Garcia at: jgarcia@rwdsu.org or (212) 684-5300.