Frequently Asked Questions

For Black/African American Community & Civic Organization Leaders

Overview

Community and civic organizations within the Black/African American population are integral to the community. They are essential in keeping Black/African American people connected and informed and effective in making an impact where and when necessary. Many Black/African American people across various socioeconomic groups are members of these organizations and are often in more than one of these groups.

Community and civic organizations have been consistently on the front line of the effort to provide aid and resources to the community during the global pandemic. They have done this directly by dealing with COVID-19 prevention or by helping community members cope and move forward in the aftermath of the pandemic through education or financial assistance. These organizations are now primed and ready to support dissemination of vaccine information and continued preventive measures.

Messaging to spread awareness and education regarding vaccine information should be clear and easy to understand. These groups are key to spreading and educating Black/African American people, regardless of socioeconomic status. Information given to members of this group should prepare them to be messengers and educators for building vaccine confidence and the continued prevention of COVID-19.

The HHS COVID-19 public education campaign is providing these frequently asked questions and answers for Black/African American community and civic organization leaders to be able to address common concerns about COVID-19. The Campaign aims to increase public confidence in and uptake of COVID-19 vaccines while reinforcing basic prevention measures such as mask wearing and social distancing. This information includes the latest facts from CDC and will resonate with Black/African American audiences when they come from trusted voices.

This guidance is not intended to infringe on rights protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution or any other federal law, including the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993.

About COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a novel coronavirus that hasn’t been previously seen in humans. Because it’s a new virus, scientists are learning more each day. While most people
who have COVID-19 have mild symptoms, COVID-19 can cause severe illness and even death. Some people, including African Americans and those with certain underlying medical conditions, have been more affected by COVID-19 than others and are at increased risk of severe illness.

**How does COVID-19 spread?**

COVID-19 spreads mainly through close contact from person to person, including between people who are physically near each other (within 6 feet.) People who are infected but don’t show symptoms can also spread the virus to others. COVID-19 spreads easily from person to person, yet how easily a virus spreads person to person can vary.

**What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

People with COVID-19 have reported a wide range of symptoms. Some people have no symptoms (they are asymptomatic) while others have mild-to-severe illness. Symptoms, which may appear 2–14 days after exposure to the virus, include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Feeling tired
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

This list doesn’t include all the possible symptoms. CDC will continue to update the symptom list as more information becomes available.

**About Organization Operations**

**How can I protect myself and others from COVID-19 within our organization/community?**

Ensure that your membership base and the communities you serve are aware of safety protocols since anyone can spread the virus before they know they’re sick.

Get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you can. Until you’re fully vaccinated (2 weeks after your final dose), continue to:

- Wear a mask when you’re inside public spaces.
• Stay at least 6 feet (or 2 arm lengths) apart from people who don’t live with you and who may not be vaccinated.
• Avoid crowds. The more people you’re in contact with, the more likely you are to be exposed to or spread COVID-19.
• Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol when soap and water aren’t available.

My committee/chapter would like to meet or host an event in person. What do I need to do to participate safely?

Stay up-to-date and follow the COVID-19 guidelines provided by our organization and state laws and regulations in following the steps necessary for hosting events. CDC highly recommends avoiding hosting and attending events and gatherings in person, because it increases your risk of getting and spreading COVID-19. However, once events and gatherings are permitted in person by our organization and state guidelines, follow CDC guidance for in-person events and gatherings.

As for right now, continue to host events virtually and following CDC guidelines.

What do I do if I am feeling sick?

Take steps to care for yourself and help protect others in your home and community, including staying home and separating yourself from those within your household. You can still attend virtual events and meetings online, if available.

What can I do to stay connected with our membership base and our service communities?

Let’s reach out and support those members within our organization who can’t be physically present at events and meetings during these trying times. Please keep in contact with them, call them, and ask how our chapter/organization can assist them. Remember you can safely connect via text, calls, and video. Our community is here to support you emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Don’t hesitate to reach out to us and those you know who are alone or isolated to prevent getting the virus.

About COVID-19 Vaccines

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Yes. Safety is a top priority, and there are many reasons to get vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccines were tested in large medical studies to make sure they meet safety standards. Many people were recruited to participate in these studies to see how the vaccines offer protection to people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as to those with different medical conditions. All COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States were carefully evaluated to ensure
their safety before being authorized for use. Also, the FDA and CDC have very strict systems to monitor vaccine safety and side effects once the vaccines are in use.

**How was a COVID-19 vaccine developed so fast?**

Scientists were able to quickly develop a vaccine because they were well-funded and used both proven and new technology. Also, vaccines were manufactured while safety data was still being reviewed by scientists, doctors, and other experts.

**Are there side effects associated with the vaccine?**

People who’ve been vaccinated commonly report side effects—normal signs that your body is building protection against the virus that causes COVID-19. These side effects are mild and typically short-lived, lasting at most a few days. The most common side effect is a sore arm at the injection site. Other side effects include fever, feeling tired, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, and chills.

**Can the COVID-19 vaccine cause the COVID-19 disease?**

No. You can’t get COVID-19 from the vaccines. None of the COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States contains the live virus that causes COVID-19.

**Will any of the new COVID-19 vaccines alter my DNA?**

No. None of the vaccines available in the United States will alter your DNA or genetic makeup. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines use something called messenger RNA (mRNA), a lab-made molecule that is found in its natural form in almost all plants and animals, to protect people from getting COVID-19. But it doesn’t change or interact with your DNA.

**When can I get vaccinated?**

Vaccines are here now and everyone age 12 and older in the United States can get them. You have three ways to find vaccines near you:

- Go to vaccines.gov
- Text your ZIP code to 438829
- Call 1-800-232-0233

**How many doses of the vaccine are needed?**

Now there are FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines recommended for use in the United States. The FDA authorized them only after confirming that they were proven safe and effective in medical studies involving tens of thousands of volunteers. Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen COVID-19 vaccine only requires one shot. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines require two shots to get the most protection.
What can I do once I’m fully vaccinated?

According to CDC, if you’re fully vaccinated (2 weeks after your final dose), you DON’T have to wear a mask indoors or outdoors in public (except in health care settings), and you DON’T have to keep your distance from other people.

If you’re not vaccinated, you should continue to:

- Wear a mask when inside public places.
- Keep at least 6 feet part from people who don’t live with you and who may not be vaccinated.
- Avoid crowds.
- Avoid poorly ventilated spaces.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.

Vaccinated and unvaccinated people must still follow federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial laws, rules, and regulations. That includes public transportation, airport/airplane, local business, and workplace guidance.

Also, if you have a medical condition or you take medicines that weaken your immune system, you may NOT be fully protected from COVID-19 even if you’re fully vaccinated. Talk to your health care provider. Even after vaccination, you may need to continue taking precautions.

Learn more at cdc.gov/coronavirus.

Who can I talk to if I have additional questions?

If you have questions regarding COVID-19, preventive measures, or the vaccines, please let us know and we’ll make sure you have the most recent facts and science-based information. You can also go to cdc.gov/coronavirus or the website of your local public health department.

SAFETY IS THE TOP PRIORITY

The FDA and CDC have the highest standards when it comes to ensuring the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. Their process includes the following procedures:

✔ Scientists must first test vaccines extensively in medical studies to ensure they are safe and effective.

✔ Before the FDA authorizes a vaccine for use among the public, it ensures its safety by independently:
  - Reviewing the data from the medical studies, and
  - Inspecting the manufacturing facilities.

✔ Even after a vaccine has been authorized, the FDA and CDC closely monitor vaccine administration to identify even rare side effects or reactions.
The FDA and CDC closely review any reports of side effects or reactions and share these facts with the public.

The extremely rare cases of blood clotting following Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen vaccine—just a small number of cases out of millions of vaccinations—show that the FDA and CDC’s vaccine safety monitoring systems work and catch even the rarest of reactions.

A thorough investigation has confirmed that Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen vaccine is safe and effective.

And doctors have been notified and trained to understand the signs to watch for and the proper course of treatment if blood clots occur.