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COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

For Faith-Based Leaders

Questions From Faith-Based Leaders

Given how easily the virus spreads, how can faith-based organizations offer safe in-person services?

To slow the spread of COVID-19 in your communities, it's important to follow public health recommendations. Check frequently with your state and local health authorities for the latest information, because safety precautions depend on the severity of infection rates in your region. There are some precautionary measures that religious leaders can adopt when organizing in-person services so they can continue practicing their faith while keeping their staff and congregation safe at the same time.

It's important to remember that even those who don't show symptoms can spread the virus.

Encourage community members to get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they can. Until everyone is fully vaccinated:

- Encourage people to stay 6 feet apart from people who don't live with them and who may not be vaccinated.
- Host gatherings outdoors when possible. If not feasible, make sure the room or space is well-ventilated. Arrange tables and chairs to allow people to stay 6 feet apart.
- Wear masks inside public places and remind community members to use their own. It's a good idea to provide masks for those who don't have them.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water and ask your community members to wash their hands for 20 seconds before and after entering the service/gathering. It's a good idea to provide hand sanitizer and to clearly mark handwashing areas.
- Clean commonly touched surfaces and any shared items between use.

How can faith-based organizations expand our operations during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Faith-based organizations should establish and maintain communication with local and state authorities to determine current policies

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in their communities. Some recommendations include:

- Ensure community contact lists are current and create "call trees" to reach members with updates.
- Consider how your organization can continue to use technology to make services and events available online—even as you begin to gather in person.
- Consider how community and liturgical practices can be adapted to minimize close contact. Refer to your national and regional leaders for specific guidance.
- Invite your congregants to greet each other from a distance, taking into consideration that we are protecting each other in a safe manner and not intending to be disrespectful or rude.
- Consider suspending certain religious rituals by draining baptismal fonts, holy water stations, and vessels used for ritual washing.

What procedures should we follow if a member of our community has been infected with COVID-19 and was in contact with the rest of our congregation?

If a community member has been infected, faith leaders should:

- Ensure the member's privacy and ask the person to distance themselves from the community and not attend any of the religious or public places where they could infect other people. The safety of their family and community is the most important thing.
- Check on the infected individual from afar, such as through phone calls, and recommend that they follow up with their health care provider if additional medical help is needed.
- If this person was in your facility, notify your local health officials. They can guide you on what best practices to follow. Ensure the privacy of the infected person, as required by federal law. Tell staff and other congregants about the potential exposure and encourage them to stay home, self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidelines should they develop symptoms.

How do we prepare our congregation for COVID-19 vaccination?

It's important that faith-based organizations prepare their congregations for the COVID-19 vaccination program. Experts have confirmed that COVID-19 vaccines will help reduce the spread of the disease in communities.

- Receiving the vaccine is an act of love to our families and neighbors.
- Provide regular and accurate information to congregants and the community in support of the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines.
- Share clear and accurate information with your community to make sure they understand the risks and benefits of getting vaccinated and can make informed decisions for themselves and their families.
- Sign up for the COVID-19 Community Corps to receive timely updates and information to share with your family, friends, and community.
- Organize virtual meetings with your communities, in collaboration with local health authorities or community health centers, about the COVID-19 vaccines to strengthen the confidence of community members to get vaccinated.

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: COVID-19 FAQS

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Questions From the Congregation

How does the virus that causes COVID-19 spread?

Scientists are still learning about the virus that causes COVID-19, how it spreads, and the severity of the disease it causes. What we do know is that the virus is spread easily from person to person if they are in close contact with one another (within 6 feet). We also know that:

- Infections mostly occur through exposure to respiratory droplets.
- The virus can spread when droplets linger in the air and come into contact with a person.
- People not feeling sick or showing symptoms can still spread the virus to others.
- The virus is not commonly spread by contact with contaminated surfaces.
- Taking the precautions outlined by CDC can help to slow the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States meet the FDA's rigorous standards for safety and effectiveness. Tens of millions of people in the United States have received COVID-19 vaccines, and all COVID vaccines will continue to be monitored for safety.

Serious health effects from vaccines are very rare. It's highly unlikely that COVID-19 vaccines will cause long-term health problems. Also, there is no evidence at all that they will cause infertility or cancer.

Your risk for serious health problems is much lower from the vaccine than your risk if you're unvaccinated and get COVID-19. COVID-19 can leave you with heart and lung damage and other conditions that require long-term treatment. Vaccines are much safer paths to immunity than the disease itself.

Are the vaccines free to the public? Who is paying for them?

COVID-19 vaccines are 100% free for every individual living in the United States—even if you do not have insurance. Vaccination providers can be reimbursed for vaccine administration fees by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients by the government. No one can be denied a vaccine if they are unable to pay a vaccine administration fee.

If you are uninsured and receive a bill related to COVID-19 testing or treatment, ask your provider to bill the HRSA COVID-19 Uninsured Program instead of you.

In response to concerns of access barriers some immigrants are facing regarding documentation requests prior to receiving a vaccination, and individuals inappropriately being sent bills for COVID-19 vaccine fees,

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HHS created fact sheets to help you better understand your rights and responsibilities regarding access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Do you need to be an American citizen to get a vaccine?

Everyone is eligible for COVID-19 services, regardless of your immigration status. Testing, treatment, or vaccinations paid for by the federal government will not affect anyone's immigration status or be shared with immigration agencies.

How were the COVID-19 vaccines developed so fast?

The world was able to develop COVID-19 vaccines so quickly thanks to years of previous research on similar viruses. Also, new technology was used in the development of the vaccines as well as sufficient funding that allowed firms to run multiple clinical trials and review data from those trials while vaccines were being made.

Are there side effects associated with the vaccines?

Some people report mild side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine, including a soreness where you get the shot, fever, chills, feeling tired, or headaches. These side effects usually go away on their own in a few days. These side effects are signs that your immune system is working to build up protection against the disease.

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How effective are the COVID-19 vaccines?

All available COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective against severe illness, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19, including from the Delta variant.

Remember, to get the most protection from the vaccines, you need all the recommended doses:

- The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines require two initial doses.
- Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine requires one initial dose.

If you meet the criteria for having a compromised immune system, you should get a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine at least 4 weeks after your second dose.

If you've been vaccinated, you may be eligible for a booster shot to keep up your protection. See the latest guidance on boosters.

Why should I get vaccinated if I can still get infected with COVID-19?

It's important to understand that infection doesn't necessarily lead to illness. If you're fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and the virus manages to enter your body and begins to multiply—that is, infect you—your immune system will be prepared to quickly recognize the virus and keep it from doing real damage. That's why most people who get infected

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with COVID-19 despite being vaccinated—so-called breakthrough cases—have no symptoms (asymptomatic) or only mild-to-moderate illness.

Nearly everyone in the United States who is getting severely ill, needing hospitalization, and dying from COVID-19 is unvaccinated.

CDC recommends you get vaccinated as soon as you can.

Will the COVID-19 vaccines prevent me from infecting others?

COVID-19 vaccines reduce the likelihood that you'll develop and be able to spread COVID-19. In rare occasions, some vaccinated people can get COVID-19 from the highly contagious Delta variant and spread it to others. Importantly, only a very small amount of spread happening around the country comes from vaccinated individuals.

Can the COVID-19 vaccines cause the COVID-19 disease?

No, a person cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine. None of the COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States use the live virus that causes COVID-19.

Do any of the new COVID-19 vaccines change a person's DNA?

No, none of the COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States will change a person's DNA or genetic makeup. Two of the vaccines, one by Pfizer-BioNTech and the other by Moderna, use something called messenger RNA (mRNA), a lab-made material that is found in its natural form in almost all plants and animals, to protect people from getting COVID-19. But it does not change or interact with a person's DNA or alter their genetic structure because it doesn't enter the cell nucleus, where DNA is kept.

Who should receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

Everyone age 5 and older is now eligible to get a COVID-19 vaccination. Get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you can. Widespread vaccination is a critical tool to help stop the pandemic. You have three ways to find vaccines near you:

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

What is "Herd" or Community Immunity?

Herd immunity means that enough people in a community are protected from getting a disease because they've already had the disease or because they've been vaccinated. Herd immunity makes it hard for the disease to spread from person to person, and it even protects those who cannot be vaccinated, like newborns or people who are allergic to the vaccine. For more information, visit cdc.gov/coronavirus.

Can people stop using face masks after receiving the vaccine?

If you're fully vaccinated, you can participate in many of the activities that you did before the pandemic. To maximize protection from the highly contagious Delta variant and prevent possibly spreading it to others, wear a mask inside public places if you're in an area of substantial or high spread of COVID-19.

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: COVID-19 FAQS

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If you're not yet 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 often 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.

Do people with compromised immune systems need extra doses of a COVID-19 vaccine?

People with compromised immune systems are less able to fight infections. If any of the following apply to you, you may not be fully protected from COVID-19 even if you've received two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech's or Moderna's mRNA COVID-19 vaccine:

- You have a moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency disorder, such as DiGeorge syndrome or Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome.
- You have an advanced or untreated HIV infection.
- You've ever had an organ transplant or had a stem cell transplant within the last 2 years.
- You're being treated with corticosteroids or other immunosuppressant medicines for such conditions as arthritis, asthma, or an autoimmune disease, such as lupus, sarcoidosis, inflammatory bowel disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and psoriasis.
- You're being treated for cancer.

To get the most benefit from the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, people with compromised immune systems should get a third dose. Wait at least 4 weeks after you get your second dose to get your third dose.

You should also continue to follow current COVID-19 prevention measures until your health care provider says it's safe for you to stop:

- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth around people you don't live with and when inside public places.
- Stay at least 6 feet apart from people you don't live with.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces.
- Wash your hands often 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.

What is the best place to find more information regarding COVID-19?

The CDC website is the best place for individuals and organizations to find the most current and relevant information regarding COVID-19. More information is available at cdc.gov/coronavirus.

You can also sign up for the COVID-19 Community Corps to receive timely updates and information to share with your family, friends, and community.