

Questions & Answers: COVID Vaccines

MAY 2021

The **COVID-19 vaccines** have been steadily rolling out in Whatcom County. About a third of residents have gotten at least one dose.

Among people age 65 and up, that number is even higher:

- **75%** of people have gotten at least one dose of vaccine.
- **Over 60%** are fully vaccinated (one dose of Johnson & Johnson, or both doses of the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines).

A number of people still have questions about how safe and effective the vaccines are. Here are answers to some common questions.

WHAT DOES "EMERGENCY USE AUTHORIZATION" MEAN?

The COVID-19 vaccines have been reviewed by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA has made them available under what's called an **Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)**.

The FDA official overseeing the vaccine reviews says the vaccines:

- Had to meet safety and effectiveness standards similar to a full license.
- Are allowed to be used while the manufacturers prepare to apply for full licenses this year, collecting more data on how long the vaccines will be effective and if there are longer-term side effects.

So far the vaccines have an excellent safety record. As of April 29, over **237 million doses** have been given in the US. CDC and FDA physicians review medical records of adverse effects, and they have determined the benefits of being protected from COVID-19 are much greater than the miniscule risk of harm from any of the vaccines.

EUAs have been used during other public health emergencies such as the Ebola and Zika viruses.



DO I HAVE TO GET A SECOND DOSE? DOES IT HAVE MORE SIDE EFFECTS?

- Two of the vaccines, Pfizer and Moderna, require two doses for maximum protection from the coronavirus.
- Reports of side effects like fever, chills, and aches are more common after the second dose.
- Please don't let that stop you from getting the second shot.
- Like the measles-mumps-rubella and shingles vaccines, your immune system needs more than one dose to protect you.
- Side effects generally last a day or two and then subside.
- Side effects are normal--they show the vaccines are getting your immune system to work.
- But not everyone feels side effects, so don't be concerned if you don't have any.

WHAT ABOUT BREAKTHROUGH CASES?

- There have been some people who have tested positive for COVID after being fully vaccinated (more than two weeks have passed since their final dose of vaccine). These are called **breakthrough cases**.
- Since the vaccines are not 100% effective, it's normal and expected that some people may still test positive for COVID after getting their shots.
- Out of one million fully vaccinated Washington residents, only 102 breakthroughs were reported as of March 30. That's 0.01%--one-hundredth of one percent.
- You should still get your vaccine, as it is safe and effective for the vast majority of people.

QUESTIONS ABOUT COVID OR THE VACCINE?

- Washington State Dept of Health COVID hotline (language assistance available):
1-800-525-0127
- Whatcom County Health Dept:
covid@co.whatcom.wa.us

CALL WASHINGTON LISTENS 1-833-681-0211

A free, anonymous service for any Washingtonian feeling sad, anxious, or stressed.