

Vaccine FAQ

Updated February 17, 2021

Q: I received the first vaccine dose through my employer but no longer work there. How do I get my second dose?

A: Please contact your local health department for help arranging a second dose appointment. To help with scheduling, be sure to have your vaccination record card with the date of your first vaccination and which vaccine you received.

If you received the Pfizer vaccine, it's possible you may need to travel to get your second dose. Not all sites can receive the Pfizer vaccine due to its storage requirements.

Q: Will my local pharmacy be giving vaccinations?

A: Eventually, but doses for local pharmacies are very limited for now.

Nebraskans are encouraged to ask if their pharmacy is planning to be a vaccine provider.

In mid-February, pre-approved pharmacies in about 30 communities across Nebraska began receiving doses as part of the federal Retail Pharmacy Program. Currently, these pharmacies can vaccinate those 65 and older and are working with local health departments to manage appointments. However, doses for this program are very limited for the time being.

Some pharmacies are part of the vaccine network managed by DHHS and local health departments, but while supplies are limited, most vaccines are given in a community clinic setting. Nebraska receives about 30,000 first doses each week which are allocated by DHHS and local health departments, while pharmacies in the federal program receive less than 6,000 first doses a week.

More pharmacies will be added as the vaccine supply expands, but it will take time.

Q: I live with someone who is considered high-risk for COVID-19. Can I be vaccinated when they are?

A: Potentially. Please contact your local health department to ask how they are handling vaccination for those who are caregivers or the partner of someone at increased risk for severe COVID-19.

Many local health departments are trying to accommodate these situations and may opt to vaccinate those living with someone who is high-risk. It depends on supplies, and the decision is made at the local level.

Q: Can my child be vaccinated against COVID-19?

A: Not yet. COVID-19 vaccines have only been approved for use in young adults so far. The Pfizer vaccine is authorized for those 16 and up, and the Moderna vaccine for those 18 and up. Children's immune systems are different from adults' so more research is needed to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are safe for them.

Clinical trials for those 12 and up are going on now, and if successful, the data will be reviewed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Vaccines for younger children and infants will take more time to develop.

Remember that most children developing COVID-19 recover well. Prevention is their best protection against COVID-19. Taking basic precautions like wearing a mask if they are 2 or older, keeping distance, and washing their hands regularly helps them stay well, and staying home when sick helps prevent others from getting sick.

Nebraska is preparing to vaccinate those with [high-risk medical conditions](#) who are at least 18. Please use the state [vaccine registration site](#) so they can be included in Phase 1B vaccinations when supplies are available in your area.

Q: I'm pregnant, should I get the vaccine?

A: Data is still limited, but medical experts believe the vaccines approved in the U.S. are unlikely to pose a specific risk for those who are or who later become pregnant.

Clinical trials did not include those who were pregnant, but a number of participants became pregnant over the course of the trials, and more than 10,000 pregnant people have been vaccinated in the U.S. so far with no indication of concerns to date. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists say there is no data to support withholding vaccines from those who are or become pregnant.

Pregnancy can increase the risk for severe COVID-19 and other complications. Those who are pregnant are included in Phase 1B, and are able to [register to be notified](#) when vaccination for high-risk groups begins in your area.

If you have concerns, talking with your health care provider may be helpful in making an informed decision.

Q: I'm currently breastfeeding, should I get the vaccine?

A: The CDC says vaccines approved in the U.S. are not thought to be a risk to breastfeeding infants.

While there is currently no data on the effects of vaccines on infants, or the effect on milk production and excretion, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has said the unknowns do not outweigh the potential benefit of vaccination.

If you have concerns, talking with your health care provider may be helpful in making an informed decision.

Q: I'm over 65 and registered for the vaccine, but haven't heard when I'll be scheduled. Am I still on the list?

A: Yes. If you registered using the state website, you should have received an email confirming that your registration was received.

It's estimated that 500,000 Nebraskans are eligible for Phase 1B, which includes those 65 and older, those with medical conditions putting them at high-risk, and those working in critical industries.

Nebraska is receiving about 30,000 first doses a week, so it may take 3 to 4 months for all those wanting the vaccine to receive it. Many local health departments began by vaccinating those 70, 75 or 80 and older so that those facing the greatest risk from COVID-19 are protected first.

Please do not worry if you aren't contacted for several weeks or even a month or more – everyone is working diligently to get doses out as new shipments arrive each week.

It is challenging to wait but if you completed registration, you are on the list.

(Questions originally posted February 5, 2021)

Q: I already had COVID-19. Do I still need the vaccine?

A: Yes. You are encouraged to be vaccinated as soon as it's available to you – even if you already had COVID-19. Widespread vaccination is critical to ending the COVID-19 pandemic.

You may have some short-term protection after recovering from COVID-19, but medical experts don't yet know how long it lasts. And because you can catch COVID-19 more than once, vaccination provides the best protection against getting sick a second time.

In addition, clinical studies show that the immune response to a vaccine is stronger than the body's natural response to illness, which means being vaccinated gives you better protection against COVID-19.

Q: I need proof I've been vaccinated. Do I need a letter?

A: You will receive a card at your first dose appointment that includes the name of the vaccine you receive, the dates for first and second doses, the clinic site or the name of the person giving the vaccine, and a reminder of when and where to get your second dose.

This card serves as your record of vaccination. It should be accepted as proof of vaccination. **Please keep it in a safe place** with other medical records and important documents.

Remember that to complete vaccination, you need two doses of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

Q: Can I travel if I get the vaccine?

A: There are no in-state or state-to-state travel restrictions, and the rules for international destinations vary widely. While travel is not restricted, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends reconsidering travel abroad and delaying non-essential travel.

Clinical studies show the greatest chance for protection against COVID-19 is developed about two weeks after receiving a second dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. While vaccines are very effective at preventing you from getting sick, it's not yet clear to what degree they prevent the virus from spreading.

Because you can be sick with COVID-19 and not have any symptoms, wearing a mask, washing your hands often, keeping your distance, and avoiding the 3C's (crowded places, close contact with others, and confined spaces) is still important for everyone, every time you leave the house. These basic steps help prevent the virus from spreading.

In addition, those planning international travel are advised that travelers to the U.S. are required to provide proof of a COVID-19 test taken no more than 3 days before their flight. There is no exception for those who have completed vaccination.

Travelers need to present either a negative result or documentation of having recovered from COVID-19 to their airline before boarding. This applies to all passengers two years and older and includes citizens and permanent residents. [More detail is available from the CDC.](#)

Q: I don't live in Nebraska, but I work here. Can I still get vaccinated?

A: If your employer is part of the critical infrastructure workforce identified by DHHS and your local health department, it's likely you can be vaccinated as part of Nebraska's Phase 1 effort.

A number of critical industries are included in Nebraska's vaccination plan, but local health departments make the final decision on how vaccines are distributed while supplies are limited.

You should talk to your employer to find out if your workplace is included in Phase 1B, and how vaccination is being handled in your area.

Q: Can my relative who is staying with me get a vaccine while they are here?

A: It's unlikely. While vaccine supplies are limited, doses are reserved for Nebraska residents.

Those visiting from out of state are not eligible to receive the vaccine in Nebraska.

The only exception is for those who work in critical industries in Nebraska as part of Phase 1.

If the relative is a Nebraska resident and part of a Phase 1A or 1B priority group, but is currently living outside their county of residence, you should contact your local health department for further guidance.

(Questions originally posted January 29, 2021)

Q: How do I register to get the vaccine? (updated Feb. 17, 2021)

A: DHHS has a registration website available to notify Nebraskans when COVID-19 vaccination begins in their area.

Available at vaccinate.ne.gov, the registration site is only open to Nebraska residents.

Family, trusted friends and caregivers are encouraged to assist others with vaccine sign-up if needed. Those interested in registering will need to provide name and contact information, date of birth, occupation, and answer health questions used to help determine priority group eligibility.

Any information entered is strictly confidential and used solely for this purpose.

A Spanish translation of the website is now available. To access, users select Español from the language drop-down menu at the top-right side of the page.

Those without access to a computer are encouraged to seek assistance from someone they know to get registered. The DHHS Information line can also assist those with limited technology, language or Internet access. It is staffed each day from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. CT, and is available by calling 531-249-1873 or 833-998-2275. *Call volumes may be high as the state prepares for new phases of vaccination, so patience is appreciated.*

Q: I already registered with my local health department to get the vaccine. Do I need to register on the Nebraska site too?

A: If you are 65 or older and signed up through your local health department, you do not need to register a second time on the state vaccine registration site.

Local health department lists will be merged with the state registration system, and you will be contacted when vaccine supplies are available in your area.

Those who are 18 to 64 with a high-risk medical condition and live outside of Lancaster County are asked to register using the state site to help ensure proper prioritization in Phase 1B. Residents of Lancaster County should register using the local health department's online vaccine registration option.

Family members and caregivers are encouraged to assist with vaccine sign-up if needed.

Q: If I registered early, will I be first in line for the vaccine?

A: Not necessarily. Vaccines **are not** distributed on a first come, first served basis.

Local health departments are coordinating vaccination and to help ensure equal access, appointments will be scheduled from a randomized list of those who are eligible and interested in receiving the vaccine.

Q: How soon after receiving the vaccine am I safe?

A: Clinical studies show that some protection develops in the weeks after your first dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, but the greatest chance for protection against COVID-19 is developed about two weeks after receiving a second dose.

However, taking basic precautions to prevent virus spread are still important for everyone while vaccine supplies are limited and COVID-19 vaccination rates are very low.

Q: Does getting the vaccine mean I no longer need a mask?

A: No. The Pfizer vaccine was 95% effective and the Moderna vaccine 94% effective in preventing the symptoms of COVID-19, compared to flu vaccines which are generally 40 to 60% effective. But neither vaccine provides complete protection.

And while COVID-19 vaccines are very effective at preventing you from getting sick, it's not yet clear to what degree they prevent the virus from spreading.

Given that you can be sick with COVID-19 and not have any symptoms, wearing a mask and taking other basic precautions like washing your hands often, keeping your distance and avoiding the 3 C's (crowded places, close contact with others, and confined spaces) will help protect others.

Q: What are the side effects for COVID-19 vaccines?

A: Mild side effects like a sore arm and fatigue are some of the most commonly-reported symptoms associated with COVID-19 vaccines. While many people will have no symptoms, for others there can be some pain or swelling on the arm where the dose was given, headaches, chills, or a fever.

These side effects are normal and a sign that your body is building protection, and you should be feeling better within a few days.

Some people have experienced reactions such as hives, swelling and wheezing in the hours after vaccination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages anyone experiencing more serious side effects to report them to their health care provider, or via the [CDC's V-Safe app](#).

V-Safe is a health checker app that gives vaccine recipients a way to report side effects or reactions, and allows for follow-up with those experiencing a serious reaction.

Q: I have allergies. Should I get the vaccine?

A: Those who have had an allergic reaction to [ingredients in the Pfizer or Moderna](#) vaccines, or to another vaccine, should consult with their doctor before getting either vaccine.

The CDC advises that those with food, pet, latex, environmental, or oral medication allergies may be vaccinated.

Severe allergic reactions, such as anaphylaxis, have occurred but are very rare, and the CDC offers [additional guidance](#) for those with a history of severe allergic reactions.

(Questions originally posted January 22, 2021)

Q: I started vaccination but then tested positive for COVID-19. Do I still have to isolate?

A: Yes. Anyone testing positive for COVID-19 should isolate for at least 10 days, starting on the day their symptoms begin, or the date of their test if there are no symptoms.

After the 10 day period, isolation can end when both of these conditions have been met:

- You're fever-free without the use of fever reducing medicine for 24 hours, and
- While some symptoms may linger, COVID-19 symptoms are improving overall.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses given several weeks apart, followed by additional time needed to reach full effectiveness, so anyone testing positive for COVID-19 should still isolate to avoid spreading the virus to others.

Q: Do I need to get both vaccine doses to be protected?

A: At this time, yes. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines authorized for emergency use in the U.S. require two doses given at least 21 or 28 days apart to reach their full effectiveness against COVID-19.

In addition, the same brand of vaccine must be administered for both doses.

The Pfizer vaccine was 95% effective and the Moderna vaccine 94% effective in phase three clinical trials, compared to flu vaccines which are generally 40 to 60% effective.

The body will develop some protection in the weeks following the first dose, but research shows the best protection against symptoms and potential complications of COVID-19 comes from receiving both doses.

Other vaccines are in clinical trials and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may approve a single-dose vaccine in the months to come, but while supplies are limited, Nebraskans are encouraged not to wait and to get the vaccine that's available to them.

Q: What about new COVID-19 strains? (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

A: Nebraska is monitoring for each of the new strains, which appear to be more contagious, but do not appear to be more severe. Research is being done to learn more about them.

Medical experts believe the two vaccines approved so far in the U.S. are effective against these new strains.

Because they can spread at a faster rate and result in more infections and more hospitalizations, it is critical to continue wearing a mask and to keep your distance, wash hands, and avoid the 3Cs – crowded places, close contact with others, and confined spaces – every time you're away from home.

Q: What's the vaccine approval process and where do COVID-19 vaccines fit in?

A. Vaccines are tested using multiple clinical trials. The first phase of a clinical trial tests different doses and identifies any side effects, and the second tests the effectiveness of the vaccine among a small group.

If a vaccine passes the second phase, a third phase tests any vaccine in a much larger, more diverse group, where it is compared against a placebo. If a vaccine passes safety checks and appears to work well, data from all three clinical trials can be submitted to the FDA. The FDA conducts a thorough review of all data, and vaccines meeting safety and effectiveness standards are granted an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).

Pfizer enrolled more than 43,000 people in its phase 3 clinical trial and found its COVID-19 vaccine to be 95% effective. Moderna enrolled 30,000 people in its phase 3 clinical trial and found its vaccine to be 94% effective. In December, the FDA approved both vaccines for emergency use.

Both vaccines have been determined to be safe and effective in protecting against COVID-19 symptoms, and more studies are being done to determine their long-term effectiveness.

Q: How does vaccine allocation work?

A: The federal government determines the amount of COVID-19 vaccine being sent to each state. Nebraska is currently receiving shipments of about 23,000 first doses and matching second doses each week.

Using these numbers, the DHHS Immunization team develops allocations for the state's 19 local health departments. Allocations take into account the number of people eligible for priority groups in each health department's service area, and factor for distance and social vulnerabilities associated with COVID-19.

The DHHS Immunization team is working diligently to distribute vaccine equitably in Nebraska. These added factors reflect the reality that many Nebraskans travel outside their county for work or to access health care, and that some communities have had higher rates of infection and hospitalizations during the pandemic.

Each week, DHHS places orders on behalf of local health departments, hospital systems and other vaccine providers based on their allocation targets. Shipments are sent directly to these locations, and arrive 1 to 5 days later where they are quickly distributed as needed.

(Originally posted January 8, 2021)

Q: I'm over 75 and my doctor said I'm at high risk. Am I eligible to get the vaccine soon? (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

A: Yes. As local health departments begin their Phase 1B vaccinations, many are focusing first on those 75 and older, as data shows this population is at higher risk for COVID-19-related hospitalizations and deaths.

Larger counties may have larger populations of those 75 and older to vaccinate. If you haven't already signed up with your local health department and live outside Lancaster County, please use [the state's vaccine registration site](#) so you can be notified when a vaccine is available in your area. Lancaster County residents should register using the local health department's online vaccine registration option.

Q. Can I be notified when the vaccine is available in my area? (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

A. Yes. DHHS has launched a website to help Nebraskans register to be notified when COVID-19 vaccine is available in their area.

To register, please visit vaccinate.ne.gov and fill out the basic information requested. Family, trusted friends and caregivers are encouraged to assist others with vaccine sign-up if needed.

Local health departments are coordinating vaccination for Phase 1 priority groups, and you'll be notified when clinics are available in your area.

Q. Where can I go to get vaccinated? (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

A. Vaccination is led by local health departments, and those in Phase 1B priority groups who have registered for the vaccine will be notified when clinics begin in their area.

Community clinics with scheduled appointments will be the primary way those in Phase 1B receive the vaccine. Some doctor's offices and pharmacies may also provide vaccines, but while doses remain limited, the vaccine will be given in a community clinic setting to help ensure all doses can be used in the required timeframe.

Community clinics will stagger appointments to observe social distancing and have space for monitoring after vaccination.

Q. Why is one health department ahead of others in offering the vaccine? (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

A. Less densely populated areas may have fewer people in Phase 1 groups, so it's likely they will move through vaccination at different rates. DHHS is working to distribute vaccines equitably to all parts of the state.

Q: Are people in large cities receiving the vaccine first? What about rural communities? (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

A. No. Vaccine distribution is not based on location or community size. Widespread vaccination is critical to ending the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Nebraska moves into Phase 1B, weekly allocations are based on the number of people 65 and older living in the area and the number of people working in critical industries. However all areas will receive some quantity of vaccine.

More than 115 sites across Nebraska receive vaccine shipments, and the DHHS Immunization team is working with local health departments to ensure vaccines are distributed equitably.

Q: Are you publishing vaccination data, the way you do for COVID-19 tests and hospitalizations?

A: Yes. The [COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard](#) is available and updated with the number of vaccinations given each day.

The dashboard shows a breakdown of first and second doses given by age, gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as the percent of the population aged 16 and older completing COVID-19 vaccination. Thus far, COVID-19 vaccines have only been approved for use in those age 16 and older.

Q: How many doses has the state received? (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

A: Nebraska is currently receiving about 23,000 first doses a week, along with matching shipments of second doses.

The total number of vaccine doses allocated to the state is on the [Nebraska COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard](#), which is updated daily.

Q: Who is administering the vaccine?

A: All those administering the COVID-19 vaccine must have active credentials, be licensed to provide vaccinations, and be an approved vaccine provider by DHHS.

Providers must agree to adhere to all requirements, including monitoring vaccine storage and handling, administering vaccine doses appropriately, and reporting.

For Phase 1 priority groups, COVID-19 vaccine providers include local health departments, hospitals, federally-qualified health centers, community-based clinics, and tribal health care centers.

While vaccine supplies remain limited, doses will continue to be given in a community clinic setting by a limited number of providers. Provider enrollment will expand as supply increases.

(Originally posted December 22, 2020)

Q: How did you get ready to begin vaccine distribution?

A: A plan for COVID-19 vaccination was developed last fall and is updated as new information is available from federal regulators and the CDC.

The first Emergency Use Authorization (EAU) for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine was issued on Dec. 11. Nebraska received its first allotment of vaccine doses on Dec. 14, and hospitals began vaccinations the same day. In the first week, more than 8,900 Nebraskans received their first vaccine dose.

Hospitals and health care facilities capable of storing the vaccine at the necessary temperatures received the first shipments.

As additional shipments are scheduled, doses are being distributed via an existing vaccine network that includes local health departments, federally qualified health centers, community-based clinics, and tribal health care centers across the state.

Q: How many doses do you expect to receive? (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

A: By the end of 2020, the state received approximately 86,000 doses to Phase 1A priority groups. Nebraska is receiving shipments of about 23,000 first doses a week, along with matching shipments of second doses.

Q: Are you targeting specific groups for vaccination? (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

A: Yes. Nebraska is using a phased approach to COVID-19 vaccination that began with frontline health care workers, emergency medical personnel, and residents and staff of long-term care (LTC) facilities.

Nebraska is taking into consideration the recommendations of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which identifies priority groups based on data showing the best opportunity to reduce hospitalizations and deaths.

Based on these recommendations, Phase 1 is divided in segments: Phase 1A, 1B and 1C. Nebraska is using an existing vaccine provider network to distribute doses to hospitals, local health departments, federally qualified health centers, community-based clinics, and tribal health care centers across the state.

In addition, the CDC launched a partnership with pharmacies to administer doses to LTC facility residents and staff via on-site vaccine clinics, which helps ensure safe and effective vaccination for this high priority population, and reduces the burden on health care facilities and local health departments.

A second phase of vaccine distribution for the wider population will begin when large numbers of vaccine doses are available. The CDC hasn't shared a timeline, but current projections are for late spring of 2021.

Nebraska's current COVID-19 Phase 1 priority groups are as follows:

Phase 1A

- Health care personnel (hospitals, home health care, pharmacies, EMS, primary care, dental, optometrists, outpatient providers, mental health providers, and public health)
 - The focus is on those providing direct patient care, those who may be exposed to infectious materials, and those unable to work from home
 - Initial doses should not go to administrative staff, staff working remotely, and those not in direct contact with COVID-19 patients or infectious materials
 - All other first responders will be part of Phase 1B
- LTC facility residents and staff (nursing homes, assisted living, independent living, and skilled nursing)

Phase 1B (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

- Those 65 years of age or older
- Those 18 to 64 with high-risk medical conditions. The [CDC has identified a number of conditions](#) that increase the risk for severe COVID-19.
- Essential critical infrastructure workforce – may vary by jurisdiction and be determined by the local health department:
 - First responders – police, fire, other EMS support personnel
 - Education and school services – teachers, paraeducators, janitorial staff, and those with close contact to students who are unable to work remotely
 - Those in the utilities and transportation sectors
 - Those in food processing who work in close contact settings

Phase 1C (updated Jan. 29, 2021)

- Vulnerable populations (congregate living settings)

Q: Who is in charge of your distribution effort?

A: The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is the lead agency responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The vaccination effort is led by the DHHS Incident Commander, and includes the staff of the DHHS Division of Public Health’s Immunization Program.

The Immunization Program team has been working since early 2020 with local health departments and partners across the state to plan for, receive, distribute, and administer a COVID-19 vaccine to Nebraskans.

The effort will scale up to support mass vaccination in Phase 2, which will include a larger network of pharmacies, primary care/doctor’s offices and urgent care clinics, as well as mobile and temporary clinics.

DHHS will continue to update Nebraskans on the distribution efforts for the COVID-19 vaccine.