COUNTY OF ERIE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Kathy Dahlkemper,
County Executive

Melissa Lyon, MPH, CPH
Director

COVID-19 General Vaccine FAQ

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General Vaccine Information

1.   How do the COVID-19 vaccines work? The COVID-19 vaccine works by teaching your immune system how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19, and this protects you from getting very sick with COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccines cannot make you sick with COVID-19 and do not weaken your body's natural defenses. No vaccine is 100% effective, and we do not know if vaccinated people can still give COVID-19 to others.

2.   How long does it take for the vaccine to work? There are several COVID-19 vaccines available in the U.S. If you get the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, you are fully protected two weeks after your first and only dose. If you get the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, you are fully protected two weeks after getting your second and final dose. You must get both doses of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines to be fully protected from COVID-19. You are only partially protected after your first dose of these vaccines, and you are fully protected two weeks after your second dose.

3.   If the vaccine does not stop actual infection, can a person still spread it to others even though the vaccine has stopped them from getting very sick? Yes. The virus enters your body through your nose or throat, and when you cough or sneeze you may still spread the virus to others in the community.

4.   Will the pandemic end if we all get the vaccine? As more people get the vaccine, there will be less people who get sick with or spread COVID-19 in the community. Wearing masks, social distancing, and getting vaccinated are the best ways to end the pandemic.

5.   **How old do I have to be to get a COVID-19 vaccine?** If you are 18 years or older, you can get the Moderna, Pfizer, or Johnson & Johnson vaccines. If you are 12 years or older, you can get the Pfizer vaccine.

6.   What is vaccine efficacy? Vaccine efficacy tells us how likely a vaccine is to protect you from getting sick with a disease. All COVID-19 vaccines protect you from severe COVID-19 illness and death. Moderna and Pfizer require two vaccine doses and have a 94-95% efficacy rate. Johnson & Johnson requires one dose and has a 72% efficacy rate.

7.   Are the vaccines effective against all COVID-19 variants? The COVID-19 virus can make copies of itself and change a little, which is normal for viruses. These changes are called "mutations," and a virus with one or more mutations is called a "variant." The vaccines used right now - Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson - are effective against other COVID-19 variants. As more variants are found, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will research how well the vaccines keep us safe from getting other COVID-19 variants. The CDC is currently tracking variants and will release information as it becomes available.

8.   Will I have to get the vaccine every year? Maybe. We are still learning about how long protection against COVID-19 lasts.

10.   I think I want to wait and see what the effects of this vaccine are before I take one. Why should I take it now? The CDC recommends that everyone who can be vaccinated is vaccinated. Getting vaccinated protects you and the people around you from getting COVID-19. The more people that are vaccinated the less chance you will get COVID-19.

Vaccine Cost and Residency

11.   How much will the vaccine cost? The vaccine itself is free, but your insurance may be charged an administration fee that will be covered by your insurance company. If you do not have insurance, the fee will be covered by the federal government. If you have Medicare/Medicaid, all costs are covered.

12.   Can I get my second dose in Erie County if I got the first dose somewhere else? Do I need to get both COVID vaccine doses at the same place? You do not need to get both vaccine doses at the same location. You can be vaccinated with your second dose in Erie County if you were vaccinated somewhere else with your first dose. Please bring your vaccine card to your appointment. You might be asked to show your card to the vaccine clinic staff.

13.   I am not a United States citizen or a resident of Erie County. Can I schedule an appointment in Erie County? Yes, you can schedule a vaccine appointment in Erie County if you are not a citizen or a resident.

Before Receiving the Vaccine

14.   Can I take pain-relieving medication before my vaccination? Do not take medications such as Tylenol, Motrin, or Ibuprofen before being vaccinated. Taking medicines to help treat pain and fever before getting your COVID-19 vaccine may weaken your immune response. Please talk to your doctor if you have any questions or concerns.

15.   Will the vaccine have an effect on other medications, like birth control, diabetes, or high blood pressure medications? Vaccines do not usually effect other medications such as birth control, diabetes, or high blood pressure medication. If you have questions or concerns about a specific medication, please talk to your doctor. Do not stop or wait to take medication before getting the COVID-19 vaccination unless your doctor tells you to.

16. Can the vaccine be taken at the same time as other vaccines (flu, pneumovax, etc.)? Yes. CDC now says it's OK to get the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as other vaccines.

17. What if I tested positive for COVID-19 before my vaccine appointment? If you test positive for COVID-19 in between your first and second dose of the vaccine, you should wait until you are no longer sick and are no longer in isolation before getting your second dose.

After Receiving the Vaccine

18. Why do I need to wait 15 minutes after getting the COVID-19 vaccine? It is important to wait 15-minutes after getting the COVID-19 vaccine in case you have a rare allergic reaction. A medical staff member will be checking on you to make sure you do not have any bad reactions to the vaccine. If you have a history of serious allergic reactions, be prepared to wait longer than 15 minutes.

19. How should I treat post-COVID-19 vaccination symptoms? Ibuprofen, aspirin or other over-the-counter medicines that treat pain or fever can be taken for vaccination symptoms. Please talk to a medical professional if you have any questions or concerns.

20. Is there a test you can take to make sure the vaccine is working – like an antibody test? No, there is no test you can take to see that the vaccine is working. If your body develops an immune response, which is the goal, you may test positive on some antibody tests.

21. If you've received the vaccine do you still have to quarantine? If you are fully vaccinated and do not have COVID-like symptoms, then you do not need to quarantine or be tested unless told otherwise by your local health department staff or medical professionals.

Sources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Vaccines and preventable diseases
2. PA Department of Health
3. COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Plan
4. Public Health Collaborative FAQ https://publichealthcollaborative.org/faq/