

The New COVID-19 Omicron-Specific Bivalent Vaccine

1. What is it?
 - The new COVID-19 bivalent vaccine is a combination of ½ of the original vaccine and ½ of a new vaccine that is specific for the Omicron BA5/BA4 subvariants.
2. Why do we need it?
 - The COVID-19 virus continues to change and mutate.
 - The good news is we are learning more about the virus and developing better tools for both prevention and treatment.
 - Right now, the new COVID-19 bivalent vaccine is our **best protection** to prevent COVID-19 **reinfections, hospitalizations, and death** as well as **long COVID**.
 - It provides protection that appears to:
 - be better at protection against a different variant (broader protection),
 - last longer,
 - and provide improved protection by engaging more of our immune fighter cells.
3. Who should get it?
 - Anyone 12 years old and older who has received the initial COVID-19 vaccine series, either Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson, **AND** is 2 months past their last vaccine shot. (Pfizer for 12 years old and older, Moderna for 18 years old and older)
 - Note: The previous booster shots are no longer available. The new COVID-19 bivalent vaccine is now the only booster shot that will be given.
4. What if you have recently had a COVID-19 infection?
 - You are eligible to get the new COVID-19 vaccine after you are feeling better and have completed your time in isolation. However, if you wait 3 months after your infection, you will likely get a better response from the new vaccine.
5. Can you mix and match vaccines?
 - Yes. It does not matter if you have had Moderna or Pfizer previously, you can get either the Moderna or Pfizer bivalent COVID-19 vaccine booster shot.
 - If you are a male under the age of 30, the Pfizer bivalent COVID-19 vaccine may have less risk of myocarditis (which is a rare occurrence).
6. Is it safe?
 - Yes. This new bivalent booster is similar to our new flu shot every year. It is the same type of vaccine, just an updated version.

7. What about side effects?

- The information we have from the other COVID bivalent vaccine (½ the original and ½ BA1/BA2) shows LESS side effects than the original vaccination and monovalent booster shots.
- The most common side effects are still headaches, fatigue, and muscle aches.

8. Will we continue to need booster shots?

- It is likely that the COVID-19 vaccine will be an annual shot, just like the flu vaccine.
- It is important to understand that these new vaccine boosters are **what is now necessary to be protected from severe illness and death due to COVID.**

9. Are we in the “endemic” stage now, and if so, are vaccines really needed?

- We are trying to get to the “endemic” stage. Models now suggest that this winter will be better than previous COVID winters in terms of infection rates.
- BUT we are still seeing 100,000 people die each year from COVID infections, and that is still too many (compared to the flu, which causes about 30,000 deaths each year).
- **We need to decrease transmission and the best and easiest way to do that is with vaccination.**

10. What should we expect for the future?

- Recommendations for better protection from COVID-19 infections will change, just as the virus continues to change and we get smarter about protection.
- We should assume we are not done with adjusting our protection against COVID-19.
- Doing our part and getting vaccinated as recommended allows us to reclaim our lives, our economy, and helps prevent stressing our healthcare system beyond its capacity.
- When we increase our protection by getting the recommended booster shot, it not only protects us personally, but it helps restore the familiar way of life for our communities.

11. What about the flu this year? Is the flu shot still important?

- It may be a very active flu season this year, as we are seeing a significant uptick in flu cases in the southern hemisphere (Australia).
- It will be very important to get your flu shot.
- If you are over 65, the CDC now recommends a **high dose** flu vaccine.
 - A Danish study has shown a 64% reduction in hospitalization in this age group for those who had a high dose flu shot compared to the regular dose flu shot
- You can get the flu shot and the new bivalent COVID shot on the same day, just in different arms. This is safe and effective.
- There is also some data that shows that getting your flu shot each year can decrease your risk of dementia and other diseases.