

# FACT SHEET: Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 Vaccine Benefits and Risk



**Based on careful review by national experts, we know the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines far outweigh the risks. Understand the benefits and risks of receiving the single-dose Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, which may prevent you from getting COVID-19. Effective 12/16/21 CDC endorses updated recommendations made by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) for the prevention of COVID-19, expressing a medical preference for individuals to receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine) over Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine. Johnson & Johnson should be used in limited settings as outlined below.**

## About this Vaccine

This vaccine has been authorized by the FDA for emergency use given the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and has Emergency Use Authorization for people aged 18 and older. This vaccine is a single dose injected into the muscle.

## When You Should Consider this Vaccine

- Some individuals are not medically able to take another COVID-19 vaccine (for example, some people may have had a severe allergic reaction after a previous dose).
- Some individuals who elect to receive the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 Vaccine because they would otherwise not receive a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Some individuals who would remain unvaccinated for COVID-19 who have limited access to other COVID-19 vaccines.
- We recommend these individuals discuss COVID-19 vaccination options with a medical provider.

## What to Expect When You Get the Vaccine

You may have some side effects, which are normal signs that your body is building protection. Side effects may include pain or swelling at the injection site, headache, fatigue, muscle aches, nausea, or fever. Side effects should go away within a few days.

## Risks Associated with this Vaccine

**There are benefits and risks to getting the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, and the benefits of getting vaccinated outweigh the risks. Risks include:**

- **Blood Clots:** There have been rare occurrences of blood clots (involving blood vessels in the brain, abdomen, and legs) as well as low levels of blood cells that help your body stop bleeding, in some people who have received the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. In people who developed these blood clots, symptoms began approximately 1–2 weeks after vaccination in males and females, across a wide age range of individuals 18 years and older; reporting has been highest for females ages 30 to 49 years old. For one to two weeks after receiving the vaccine, be on the lookout for shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling, persistent abdominal pain, severe headaches or blurred vision, easy bruising, or tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the site of the injection. Seek medical attention if you have any of these symptoms. To date, these rare blood clots have not been associated with the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.

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- **Rare Severe Allergic Reaction:** There is a remote chance the vaccine could cause a severe allergic reaction (difficulty breathing, swelling of face and throat, fast heartbeat, bad rash all over your body, dizziness, weakness), which would usually occur a few minutes to one hour after getting the dose. If you experience a severe allergic reaction, call 9-1-1, or go to the nearest hospital.
- **Rare Guillain-Barre Syndrome:** There have been rare cases of Guillain-Barre Syndrome after receiving the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines. Guillain-Barre is an illness, usually triggered by an infection, in which the body's immune system damages nerve cells, causing muscle weaknesses, or in the most severe cases, paralysis. Cases of Guillain-Barre Syndrome have largely been reported about 2 weeks after vaccination with Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine and mostly in males, many aged 50 years and older. You should seek medical attention if you experience weakness or tingling sensations in both legs, which may spread to the arms and upper body.

## If You Experience Side Effects

If you experience a severe allergic reaction, call 9-1-1, or go to the nearest hospital. Call the vaccination provider or your healthcare provider if you have any side effects that bother you or do not go away.

## Boosters

Immunity against disease and infection naturally wanes over time. A booster dose is a normal part of most vaccine series to ensure a person maintains optimal immunity against infection from a disease. Booster doses enhance protection against severe COVID-19, restoring immunity that might have faded since first doses were given. Based on CDC and FDA guidance, use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 (J&J) vaccine is limited to people aged 18 and older who cannot receive other COVID-19 vaccines due to medical reasons, have limited access to the other vaccines, or who elect to receive the J&J because they would otherwise not receive a COVID-19 vaccine. J&J may be used for the first booster dose by all eligible people, regardless of vaccine type received for the primary series, but the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna) are preferred. Second booster doses may only be mRNA vaccines. Please see the Pfizer Factsheet or the Moderna Factsheet for more information on second boosters. Eligibility includes people:

- Aged 18 and older, regardless of immune response, should receive a first booster dose two months after their last dose.

## More Information

For more information on dosing intervals, please see [CDPH's COVID-19 Vaccine Timing by Age](#).

Additional information is available on the CDPH COVID-19 Booster website.

