



COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

For the LGBTQ+ Community

The COVID-19 pandemic has badly impacted many in the [LGBTQ+](#) community, according to [survey data](#). At the same time, COVID-19 vaccine acceptance among LGBTQ+ persons is relatively high. But certain segments, like transgender people of color, may be more vaccine hesitant than others.

Also, many LGBTQ+ persons are likely to have underlying medical conditions, including [HIV](#) and [substance use disorders](#). That increases their risk for severe COVID-19, so it's important that they get vaccinated. And many younger LGBTQ+ persons are likely to experience [homelessness](#), which makes vaccination a challenge.

The questions and answers below will help you with ensuring that people in the LGBTQ+ community understand their risk for COVID-19 and how to access the vaccines.

For other information on LGBTQ+ health and wellness, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [website](#).

Vaccine Access, Effectiveness, and Safety

How do I get vaccinated?

COVID-19 vaccines are here now, and everyone age 12 and older can get them. You have three ways to find vaccines near you:

- Go to [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov)
- Text your ZIP code to 438829
- Call 1-800-232-0233

How much do the vaccines cost?

The COVID-19 vaccines are free of charge to everyone in the United States, regardless of your citizenship status and whether you have health insurance.

Do I need an ID or driver's license to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

It depends. Check with your [state's department of health](#). Also, before you go for your vaccine, contact the site where you will be vaccinated or review your appointment confirmation email for details about whether you need to bring ID or a driver's license with you.

How effective are the COVID-19 vaccines?

All FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines prevent nearly 100% of hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID-19.

Is it safe for me to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, the [COVID-19 vaccines are safe](#).

The FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines were tested in large medical studies to make sure they meet strict safety standards. Tens of thousands of people of different ages, races, and ethnicities, as well as people with different medical conditions, participated in these studies to see how well the vaccines work and how safe they are.

Also, the FDA and CDC continue to closely monitor the COVID-19 vaccines' safety now that they're available to the public.

More than half of adults in the United States are now fully vaccinated, and results from safety monitoring efforts are reassuring.

What are the side effects of a COVID-19 vaccine?

Some people may experience [side effects](#) after getting vaccinated, but they are generally mild and last at most a few days.

You might have pain, redness, or swelling in the arm where you got the shot, and you might experience feeling tired, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever, or nausea.

Talk to your health care provider about taking over-the-counter medicine like ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or aspirin for any pain or discomfort you may have *after*

SAFETY IS THE TOP PRIORITY

The FDA and CDC have the highest standards when it comes to ensuring the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. Their process includes the following procedures:

- ✓ Scientists must first test vaccines extensively in medical studies to ensure they are safe and effective.
- ✓ Before the FDA authorizes a vaccine for use among the public, it ensures its safety by independently:
 - Reviewing the data from the medical studies, and
 - Inspecting the manufacturing facilities.
- ✓ Even after a vaccine has been authorized, the FDA and CDC closely monitor vaccine administration to identify even rare side effects or reactions.
- ✓ The FDA and CDC closely review any reports of side effects or reactions and share these facts with the public.

The extremely rare cases of blood clotting following Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine—just a small number of cases out of millions of vaccinations—show that the FDA and CDC's vaccine safety monitoring systems work and catch even the rarest of reactions.

A thorough investigation has confirmed that Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine is safe and effective.

And doctors have been notified and trained to understand the signs to watch for and the proper course of treatment if blood clots occur.



getting vaccinated. Don't take over-the-counter medicine before your vaccine appointment to try to prevent pain or discomfort.

Do I need to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I've already had COVID?

Yes, [you should get vaccinated even if you've already had COVID-19](#). Scientists don't know yet how long the natural antibodies of people who have had COVID-19 will protect them from being infected again.

After I'm fully vaccinated, do I need to continue to wear a mask and stay 6 feet apart from people who don't live with me?

According to CDC, if you're fully vaccinated (2 weeks after your final dose), you DON'T have to wear a mask indoors or outdoors in public (except in health care settings), and you DON'T have to keep your distance from other people.

Until you're fully vaccinated, you should continue to:

- Wear a mask when inside public places.
- Keep at least 6 feet part from people who don't live with you and who may not be vaccinated.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol when soap and water are not available.

Vaccinated and unvaccinated people must still follow federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial laws, rules, and regulations. That includes public transportation, airport/airplane, local business, and workplace guidance.

Also, if you have a medical condition or you take medicines that weaken your immune system, you may NOT be fully protected from COVID-19 even if you're fully vaccinated. Talk to your health care provider. Even after vaccination, you may need to continue taking precautions.

Homelessness and COVID-19

How can people experiencing homelessness protect themselves when COVID-19 is spreading in their community?

Many of the [recommendations to prevent COVID-19](#) may be difficult for a person experiencing homelessness to do. While avoiding certain crowded locations (such as shelters) may be hard to do, people who are homeless should try to avoid other crowded public settings and public transportation. If possible, they should use take-away options for food. They should stay at least 6 feet (two arms length) from other people. And they should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as often as possible, and cover their coughs and sneezes.

Are youth experiencing homelessness required to have caregiver consent to receive a COVID-19 vaccine?

The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for people as young as age 12. While federal law doesn't require people younger than age 18 to get caregiver consent for COVID-19 vaccination or any other vaccination, state and territorial laws differ. Check your [state and local regulations](#).

Is there a COVID-19 vaccine that is preferred for people experiencing homelessness?

No. There is no preferred vaccine for people experiencing homelessness. There are currently three different COVID-19 vaccines that have been authorized for emergency use and recommended in the United States. The available vaccines have differences in how they were developed, the ingredients they contain, and whether they require one or two doses. More information on each of the vaccines can be found [here](#).

Many people will only have one vaccine option available to them. All of the currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective at preventing COVID-19. For the earliest protection from COVID-19, the best vaccine is the first one available.

For more information, visit cdc.gov/coronavirus.

HIV and COVID-19

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe for people with HIV?

The U.S. vaccine safety system makes sure all vaccines are as safe as possible. COVID-19 vaccines have gone through the same safety tests and meet the same standards as other vaccines. People with HIV were included in clinical trials, though safety data specific to this group are not yet available.

People with HIV are part of the group of people with [underlying medical conditions](#). If you have HIV, you may choose to get vaccinated if you have not had [a severe or immediate allergic reaction](#) to any of the vaccine ingredients. If you have a weakened immune system, you should also be aware of the potential for reduced immune responses to the vaccine. If you decide to get vaccinated, continue to take [everyday preventive actions](#) to protect yourself against COVID-19.

Learn more about what CDC and other federal partners are doing to make sure COVID-19 vaccines are [safe](#) and [effective](#).

What can people with HIV do to protect themselves from COVID-19?

The best way to prevent getting sick is to avoid exposure to the virus.

People with HIV should take [everyday preventive actions](#) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

If you have HIV and are taking your HIV medicine, it is important to continue your treatment and follow the advice of your health care provider. This is the best way to keep your immune system healthy.

People with HIV should also continue to maintain a healthy lifestyle by:

- Eating right,
- Getting at least 8 hours of sleep per night, and
- [Reducing stress as much as possible](#).

Staying healthy helps your immune system fight off infection should it occur.

What should I do if I have HIV and think I might have COVID-19?

Call your health care provider if you develop [symptoms](#) that could be consistent with COVID-19.

Most people have mild illness and can recover at home. If you think you have COVID-19 and have symptoms of illness, you should [get tested](#).

It's important to continue taking your HIV medicine as prescribed. This will help keep your immune system healthy.

If you experience severe symptoms, get emergency medical care immediately. Call ahead to the emergency department and tell the operator that you may have COVID-19.

Learn more about COVID-19 and [what to do if you get sick](#).

What else can people with HIV who are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 do to protect themselves?

Nearly half of people in the United States with diagnosed HIV are aged 50 years and older. People with HIV also have higher rates of certain underlying health conditions. Older age and underlying health conditions can put people with HIV at [increased](#) risk for more severe illness if they get COVID-19. This is especially true for people with advanced HIV.

Steps that people with HIV can take to [prepare](#) in addition to what is recommended for everybody:

- Make sure you have at least a 30- to 90-day supply of your HIV medicine and any other medications or medical supplies you need for managing HIV. Ask your health care provider about receiving your medicine by mail.
- Talk to your health care provider and make sure all your vaccinations are up to date, including [vaccinations against seasonal influenza \(flu\)](#) and bacterial pneumonia. These vaccine-preventable diseases disproportionately affect people with HIV.
- Establish and maintain a plan for remote clinical care. Try to establish a telemedicine link through your HIV care provider's online portal. If telemedicine is not available to you, make sure you can communicate with your provider by phone or text. You can update your remote clinical care plan every year, or any time you have a change in your health or HIV treatment.

- If your HIV is undetectable (or virally suppressed), talk to your health care provider about delaying your routine medical and lab visits.
- If your health care provider changed your HIV treatment, ask if it's safe to delay the change until follow-up testing and monitoring are possible.
- Make sure you can maintain a social network remotely, such as online, by phone, or by video chat. This can help you stay socially connected and mentally healthy, which is especially important for people with HIV.
- People with HIV can sometimes be more likely than others to need extra help from friends, family, neighbors, community health workers, and others. If you become sick, make sure you stay in touch by phone or email with people who can help you.

Can HIV medicine (ART) be used to treat COVID-19?

Currently, treatment for COVID-19 is very limited. There is no evidence that any medicines used to treat HIV are effective against COVID-19. People with HIV should not switch their HIV medicine in an attempt to prevent or treat COVID-19.

Some clinical trials are looking at whether HIV medicines can treat COVID-19. Other trials are looking at the effectiveness of different drugs to treat COVID-19 in people with HIV. They are also looking to better understand how people with HIV manage COVID-19. You can learn more at [ClinicalTrials.gov](https://clinicaltrials.gov).

Substance Use Disorders and COVID-19

Can people taking medications for opioid use disorder, such as methadone or buprenorphine, receive a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. No safety issues have been reported linking medications for opioid use disorder to adverse reactions to any of the available COVID-19 vaccines. Experts recommend people taking medications for opioid use disorder receive a COVID-19 vaccine and continue their medications as directed by their health care provider.

If I can't avoid substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic, how do I practice safer substance use?

An overdose may be less likely to turn fatal if others are present when you use substances. If you're with others, protect yourself and them:

- Get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you can.
- Wear a mask when inside public places. However, if a person is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a mask without help, they should not wear one.
- Stay at least 6 feet apart from others.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

- Avoid touching your face or your injection site with your bare hands. To prevent infection, always wash your hands and wash any injection sites with soap and water before and after handling drugs. If soap and water are not available, you can use alcohol wipes or a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

If you're unable to avoid using drugs alone, practice harm reduction strategies. Harm reduction strategies aim to reduce negative consequences associated with drug use.

For more information, visit cdc.gov/coronavirus.