

Frequently Asked Questions: COVID-19 Vaccination Version 3

1. When will Washington DOC employees be offered a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Currently vaccine is being offered to DOC employees and incarcerated individuals who meet the [Washington State Department of Health \(DOH\)](#) Phase 1A and 1B1 priority group definitions based on vaccine availability. This applies to:

1. Any worker in a high risk health care setting, meaning any DOC employee or incarcerated individual working in a setting where care is being provided to confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients and close contact with them is possible.
2. All DOC employees and incarcerated individuals aged 65 or older regardless of job duties or location.

If DOC employees believe they meet either of these definitions but have not yet been contacted, please attend a local DOC COVID vaccine clinic to receive your vaccination. Additionally DOC employees may seek vaccination in the community by visiting the [Washington DOH COVID-19 Phase Finder](#) for a statement of eligibility and [vaccination locations](#). An additional option is to visit one of the [Washington DOH mass vaccination sites](#). All DOC employees and incarcerated individuals will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccination in the coming months as future vaccine phases are initiated and the vaccine supply expands.

Revised 2/19/2021

2. When will Washington DOC receive doses of the COVID-19 vaccine?

The Department of Corrections has begun receiving COVID-19 vaccine doses and, as of December 28, 2020, has begun vaccinating departmental employees and incarcerated individuals according to the Phase 1A prioritization plan.

Revised 12/29/2020

3. How will you distribute the vaccines?

Vaccine doses will be sent directly to the facilities housing or employing the individuals and employees identified in the Phase 1A prioritization plan. Identification of receiving facilities based on updated prioritization will be done on a weekly basis. Each COVID-19 vaccine has its own handling and storage requirements requiring careful planning and coordination.

Revised 12/29/2020

4. Is Washington State Department of Corrections developing a priority list for receiving vaccinations?

Yes. While the Department would prefer to vaccinate all employees and incarcerated individuals as soon as possible, vaccine doses will initially be very limited so the Department must prioritize doses to the highest risk individuals. The priority list is based on the [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices](#)

([ACIP](#)) and [Washington State Department of Health \(DOH\)](#) recommendations for Phase 1A vaccine dosing prioritization. The recommendation is that workers in healthcare settings, who are most at risk for becoming infected, such as those working in units that care for people with COVID-19 as well as residents of long-term care facilities, be offered the first available doses of the vaccine.

According to Washington State Corrections' current Phase 1A prioritization plan, reviewed with the Washington State Department of Health, the following groups will be offered priority vaccines:

1. Departmental staff working in the [Coyote Ridge Corrections Center \(CRCC\)](#) Sage East unit, a long-term care living unit that houses geriatric incarcerated individuals with chronic medical needs and/or requiring assistance with activities and daily living;
2. Incarcerated individuals who are geriatric with chronic medical needs residing and/or requiring assistance with activities of daily living in CRCC Sage East, a long term care living unit in the facility that houses less than 40 individuals, or other long term care patients (approximately 20) with similar needs who cannot reside in Sage East;
3. Departmental staff working in medical in-patient units at multiple facilities and regional care facilities (RCF) caring for COVID-19 patients; and,
4. Departmental staff working in medical isolation units at multiple facilities comprised of COVID-19 patients.

All employees and incarcerated individuals not listed above will be offered a COVID-19 vaccination in the coming weeks and months as the Department receives more doses and further prioritization guidelines are issued by the CDC and Washington State DOH.

Revised 12/29/2020

5. Will DOC employees or incarcerated individuals be required to be vaccinated?

While COVID-19 vaccination is not required, we are strongly recommending that all DOC employees and incarcerated individuals are vaccinated. Getting vaccinated will help maintain a safe living and work environment and prevent COVID-19 outbreaks that threaten the health and well-being of all that live and work in DOC facilities.

While declining the vaccine is an option, DOC's goal is 100% vaccine coverage among employees and incarcerated individuals.

Revised 2/2/2021

6. What if DOC employees or incarcerated individuals decline to take the vaccine and then change their mind?

If DOC employees or incarcerated individuals decline the vaccine and then change their mind they will be able to receive it at a later time. They can make a request for vaccine dosing after previously declining through their facility COVID-19 Vaccine Coordinator.

Revised 2/2/2021

7. Will there be a cost for DOC employees to get the vaccine?

No, vaccines will be offered free of charge for DOC employees and incarcerated individuals.

Revised 2/2/2021

8. How do the available COVID-19 vaccines work?

The [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) issued [emergency use authorization](#) of the first COVID-19 vaccine, developed by Pfizer, on December 11, 2020, and the second developed by Moderna, on 12/18/20. To date Washington Corrections has received only doses of the Moderna vaccine. Both are [messenger RNA \(mRNA\) vaccines](#). In the human body, mRNA contains the instructions for creating proteins inside cells. In the case of these vaccines, the mRNA instructs the human cell to make viral proteins that stimulate the body's immune system to protect against future infection by the virus that causes COVID-19.

Revised 2/2/2021

9. Are the vaccines effective at preventing COVID-19 disease?

Yes, they are extremely effective in preventing symptomatic disease. In large phase 3 clinical trials, which enrolled tens of thousands of patients each, the two available COVID-19 vaccines were both approximately 94-95% effective at preventing symptoms due to COVID-19 compared with patients who received placebo.

Revised 2/2/2021

10. Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No, the currently available COVID-19 vaccines do not contain live virus making it impossible to get infected from them. Some individuals do experience post-vaccination symptoms as the immune system is stimulated, that can be similar to the symptoms of a viral infection.

Revised 2/2/2021

11. Is the vaccine more dangerous than being infected with COVID-19??

No. As of January 22, 2021, more than 400,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 infection, including many who were young and previously healthy. Vaccines must undergo rigorous testing in clinical trials before they can be approved for use. The available COVID-19 vaccines were associated with only minor, temporary side effects in clinical trials and more serious side effects are exceedingly rare.

Revised 2/2/2021

12. What are the short-term side effects of the vaccine?

Some individuals experience no side effects and some experience only soreness at the site of the injection. Others have side effects from COVID-19 vaccination that may feel like flu and might even affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. These side effects might include muscle aches, headache, and fever.

Revised 2/2/2021

13. What if someone has an adverse reaction to the vaccine that is more serious than the side effects?

DOC employees and incarcerated individuals will be monitored for adverse reactions by medical staff for 15 minutes after the vaccine is given, or for 30 minutes if they have a history of severe allergic reactions. If they have an adverse reaction after that, such as swelling of the face, mouth, difficulty swallowing or breathing, they should call 911 immediately or declare a medical emergency.

Revised 2/2/2021

14. Are there any long term side effects from the vaccine?

Since these vaccines have only been in existence for several months there is no evidence with which to answer this question with certainty. However, in general, long term adverse events from vaccines are exceedingly rare. Additionally, there is a national [Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System \(VAERS\)](#) that monitors vaccines for safety events after they have been approved and are in use, which will give us more information about long term safety in the future.

Revised 2/2/2021

15. Can I receive the vaccine if I have a history of allergies?

Yes, people with previous histories of severe allergies to other vaccines, medications, foods or bee stings can still receive the vaccine, however, it is recommended they be monitored for 30 minutes instead of the usual 15. Severe allergic reactions to the available COVID-19 vaccines have been reported in the media, but are extremely rare.

Revised 2/2/2021

16. Can the COVID-19 vaccine change my DNA?

The [mRNA](#) that comprises the COVID-19 vaccines does not enter the nucleus of human cells, where DNA resides. The mRNA is taken up into the outer part of the cell, where viral proteins are made, and then the mRNA is rapidly destroyed.

Revised 2/2/2021

17. If both vaccines require two doses, can DOC employees mix the doses and get the Moderna vaccine first followed by the Pfizer vaccine?

No, both doses employees receive must be from the same manufacturer. The two available vaccines are not interchangeable. Moderna's vaccine doses are given 28 days apart, and Pfizer's 21 days apart.

Revised 2/2/2021

18. How will people be sure to get their second dose? Is timing essential?

Tracking systems have been developed to ensure that DOC employees and incarcerated individuals receive the second dose of the correct vaccine at the right time. If you have questions about the second dose or believe you are overdue contact the facility COVID-19 vaccine coordinator by email or kite.

Timing of the second dose is important and should be given as close as possible to the recommended time interval. However, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) recently recommended that second doses of both vaccines currently in use [can be given up to 6 weeks from the first and still be effective](#) in cases where adhering to the time interval recommendation is not possible.

Revised 2/2/2021

19. If I tested positive for COVID-19, do I still need to get the vaccine?

Yes, you should still be vaccinated against COVID-19. Natural immunity to COVID-19, which is your body's immune response to infection, wanes over time, so it is recommended that you receive vaccine even if you have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past.

Revised 2/2/2021

20. Will the fact that DOC employees received a vaccine go into their medical records?

No. Corrections' Occupational Health and Wellness will document employee vaccinations in a way that is only accessible to human resources staff. Record of employee COVID-19 vaccination will be entered into [Washington State's Immunization Information System](#) so employee's primary care provider can confirm that they received it.

Revised 2/2/2021

21. What if I am pregnant or breast-feeding? Can I still get the vaccine?

If you are pregnant or breast-feeding and included in a group recommended to receive the vaccine, such as a worker in a high-risk health care setting, you may choose to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. However, it is recommended that you discuss this decision with your health care provider.

Revised 2/2/2021

22. Once DOC employees and incarcerated individuals are vaccinated, do they still need to mask and physical distance?

Yes. Until more is known about how many people will take the COVID-19 vaccine and what the overall effect on case numbers and transmission is, it is recommended that we all continue to wear masks, physically distance, and perform frequent hand hygiene.

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