

Northern Counties Health Care's Guide to the COVID-19 Bivalent Booster Vaccine

Northern Counties Health Care strongly encourages our patients and community members to get the COVID-19 Bivalent Booster Vaccine. This guide contains answers to frequently asked questions.



What are bivalent vaccines?

The new bivalent vaccine contains recipes for both the original strain of COVID-19 and the newer omicron subvariants, BA4 and BA5.

Can the bivalent mRNA booster change my DNA?

No. In order to trigger an immune response, mRNA vaccines use mRNA created in a lab to teach our cells how to make a protein (like instructions in a recipe). The protein triggers an immune response, and the immune response creates antibodies that fight future infection. The mRNA is then rapidly degraded and does not persist in your body.

We know the bivalent vaccine will help prevent severe disease, but will it prevent people from getting infected with COVID at all?

The most likely scenario is strong protection from severe disease and hospitalization, with variable protection from infection. It may prevent infection for a time, but we don't yet know for how long.

Have the new bivalent vaccines been adequately tested?

The bivalent vaccines are similar to the annual flu vaccine. The original flu vaccine was tested in a clinical trial, and when it was deemed safe and effective, it was implemented. Each year, the flu vaccine is modified slightly in order to match the circulating flu strains (it's still pie, just a different flavor). This is the same process used to create the bivalent COVID vaccine. The mRNA recipe was changed slightly, but the remainder of the vaccine is the same. Real world experience with the bivalent vaccines has not shown any more, or more severe, side effects than the original Covid vaccines.

Who should get the new bivalent booster?

The Pfizer bivalent vaccine is authorized for use as a booster dose in individuals 5 years and older, and the Moderna bivalent vaccine is authorized for use as a booster dose in individuals 6 years and older. Talk to your health care provider for recommendation for children 6 months - 5 years.

Who will benefit most from bivalent vaccines?

Everyone. Those who are more likely to have severe disease, are elderly, immunocompromised, and those with comorbid conditions like diabetes, kidney disease, and underlying lung disease benefit the most. However, every adult and eligible child can benefit from the booster to prevent illness and its consequences: feeling awful during the acute illness, a minimum 5 day isolation period, spreading illness to others, and the risk of so-called "long Covid."

Where are they available?

There are many options for getting the bivalent booster, including primary care provider offices, pharmacies, and walk-in clinics. NCHC is offering walk-in COVID vaccines and boosters at our primary care practices. Visit nchcvt.org/covid19info/ for the schedule.

State run vaccine sites can also be found by visiting: healthvermont.gov/covid-19/vaccine

Do you have to wait 90 days after having COVID to get a bivalent vaccine?

There is no risk to receiving the bivalent vaccine immediately after COVID infection, but it is more useful to wait for up to 3 months, as the COVID infection essentially serves as your booster.

How long do you have to wait after receiving your last Covid vaccine, either the second primary shot or booster (specifically, either the third or fourth dose of the original mRNA COVID-19 vaccine) to get a bivalent vaccine?

Two months.

Should I get a “different vaccine” than I did previously (mix and match)?

If you’ve had an entire Moderna series, you may see marginal benefit from getting a Pfizer bivalent booster (and vice versa). But it makes sense to get whatever vaccine is available.

Can I get the flu shot and the COVID bivalent vaccine together?

You can get the flu vaccine (and other routine vaccines) and the bivalent booster at the same visit.

Will I need to get a vaccine yearly?

It is too soon to tell, but many experts believe that the COVID will eventually become seasonal, like the flu. In this case, an annual vaccine may be sufficient.

Can bivalent vaccines be used as an initial course of vaccination?

Not at this time, but this may be authorized by the FDA in the future.

Does immunity still take two weeks to develop after this shot?

Antibody titers start to rise within days after getting the shot, but it generally takes a couple of weeks to get the highest amount of protective antibodies.

Will bivalent vaccines eventually completely replace the original COVID vaccines?

Current data suggests that the best immunity is obtained with the initial two-dose vaccinations focused on the original COVID-19 strain and then a bivalent booster.

Information compiled from the following sources:

Johns Hopkins Magazine:

<https://hub.jhu.edu/2022/09/01/bivalent-covid-boosters-q-and-a/>

UpToDate : <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/search>

Your Local Epidemiologist:

<https://yourlocalepidemiologist.substack.com/p/considerations-for-your-fall-boosters>

For additional questions or to schedule an appointment, please contact your provider's office. The schedule for Walk-in clinics held at NCHC practices can be found at nchcvt.org/covid19info/



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