

COVID-19 VACCINE Q+A

This FAQ covers basic questions about the COVID-19 vaccine, reported side effects, and employer vaccination policies. For information pertaining to your specific health insurance plan or local vaccine options please consult the following websites, and please follow the links in the footnotes for further explanations pertaining to the questions answered.

[UnitedHealthcare](#)
[BCBS](#)
[Aetna](#)
[Humana](#)
[Cigna](#)
[Memorial Hermann](#)

For any questions unanswered in this FAQ and to learn more please visit the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's website](#) and the [CDC's website](#).

Q: How do COVID-19 vaccinations work and are they different from other vaccines?

A: There are multiple COVID-19 vaccines that are going to be offered to the public. Currently, these are the Pfizer-BioNTech, the Moderna, and the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine.

Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and the Moderna vaccines are mRNA, messenger RNA, vaccines. These vaccines are different than most vaccines, which put a weakened or inactivated germ into the body. Messenger RNA vaccines do not use the live virus that causes COVID-19 and instead introduce a genetic strand of information that instructs our cells to create a spike protein that is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. This spike protein is harmless as it is found outer surface of the virus and it serves to allow the immune system to develop antibodies that will recognize the spike protein in the case of future exposure to the virus¹. This allows for an individual to develop immunity to the virus without having to be exposed to the actual virus and risk infection.

The Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine is a viral vector vaccine. This technology works by modifying a harmless virus (not the COVID-19 virus) to include the COVID-19 spike protein to get the body's immune system to start developing antibodies².

Q: Does the COVID-19 vaccination have any side effects?

A: Like most other vaccinations, the COVID-19 vaccines have had various mild side effects reported such as pain or swelling on the arm where you have received the vaccination, a fever, chills, tiredness, and headaches³. These side effects come from the immune system working hard to develop antibodies and are not a sign of infection. Though these side effects may feel like the flu and may impact your daily activities, they are not very different than the side effects for the flu shot⁴. It is recommended that you call or see a doctor as soon as possible in the case of a rare serious reaction.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/viralvector.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/expect/after.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/flushot.htm#sideeffects>

Q: What is different about the new strain of COVID-19 and will the vaccines work against it?

A: Referred to as B.1.1.7, the new strain of coronavirus has been detected in the United States after its initial identification in the United Kingdom. Research on this strain is still being conducted, but experts are claiming that the strain may be up to 50% more contagious. However, a more contagious strain does not mean that it causes more severe illness and there is no evidence that it increases the risk of death compared to the strain that has already been active in the United States. It is believed that the COVID-19 vaccines will also be effective on this virus, but more research must be done to come to a firm conclusion⁵.

Q: Can an employer require mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for employees, and do accommodations exist for those with health concerns related to a disability or religious beliefs regarding vaccination?

A: An employer can recommend and require vaccines for his or her employees if the employees receive the vaccine from a third party or provider that is not in contract with the employer⁶. However, employees who have concerns related to a disability or religious beliefs that prohibit vaccinations have the right to request to be accommodated.

All accommodations must not constitute an undue hardship on the employer and employers have the right to exclude the employee from physically entering the workplace in the case of a direct threat to the workplace, but this does not mean that the employer can automatically terminate the worker⁷. Employers should also assume that a religious request for accommodation is based off sincerely held religious beliefs⁸. The employer can offer remote work opportunities as accommodation or other various accommodations as outlined by OSHA and CDC guidelines.

⁵ <https://files.constantcontact.com/6b6dd96c001/5db47da6-a016-47f2-87a3-e223809eedc3.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.seyfarth.com/news-insights/required-read-for-all-employers-the-eeoc-issues-guidance-on-the-interplay-of-workplace-bias-laws-and-covid-19-vaccinations.html>

⁷ <https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws#K.5>

⁸ <https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws#K.6>

Q: Does a vaccine administered by an employer or through a third-party contract count as a “medical examination” for the purposes of the ADA?

A: No, vaccination itself is not a medical examination as the act of vaccination does not seek out information on an individual’s health status or impairments⁹.

Q: Are medical screening questions (to ensure there is no medical reason to prevent an employee from vaccinating) that an employer or third-party might ask subject to ADA standards for disability-related injuries?

A: Yes, pre-vaccination medical screening questions from an employer or employer contracted third party are likely to deal with information about a disability and these questions must be consistent with ADA regulations and rules¹⁰.

Q: Is asking or requiring an employee to show proof of a COVID-19 vaccination subject to ADA standards for disability-related injuries?

A: No, asking to show proof of receipt of a COVID-19 vaccination is not a disability-related injury as there are many reasons why an employee has not been vaccinated. Asking for proof is not likely to release information about a disability but asking why may elicit this information. Therefore, it is important that all questions comply with ADA standards and to avoid implicating the ADA.¹¹

⁹ <https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws#K.1>

¹⁰ <https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws#K.2>

¹¹ <https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws#K.3>