

COVID-19 VACCINE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Currently, there is limited information about the COVID-19 vaccine. South Carolina, like other states, is awaiting a time frame and further reports from the federal government about progress with vaccine development. South Carolina has developed a federally approved COVID-19 Vaccine Plan centered on the equitable distribution of the vaccine across the state, based on the most current federal guidance.

We will continue to update the public as often as possible to provide the most factual and current information. The information on this fact sheet is accurate as of November 9, 2020. Because information can change rapidly, visit scdhec.gov/COVID19vaccine for the most up-to-date information.

When will the vaccine be available?

Although DHEC does not have specifics about when a vaccine will be available in South Carolina, the CDC has shared that the United States may have limited coronavirus vaccine available in December based on current projections from vaccine manufacturers.

Who can get the vaccine?

When the vaccine first becomes available, the number of doses will be limited in South Carolina like all states. These limited doses will be allocated to vaccine providers enrolled in South Carolina according to federal guidance to be administered to those at highest risk for spreading the virus, contracting the virus or those at the highest risk of death. These groups include:

- front-line medical personnel, including those individuals who provide care for senior populations in nursing homes
- residents of nursing homes
- critical infrastructure employees, as defined by federal guidelines

As additional vaccines are approved vaccination access will be expanded to the general public when sufficient doses are available. At this time, COVID-19 vaccine supply is expected to increase substantially in 2021.

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

At this time, several vaccine candidates are in various stages of testing in humans to ensure they are both safe and effective. DHEC will communicate findings from the FDA authorization process that will follow the same protocol as for all other vaccines. The FDA is committed to science and the critical evaluation of all new vaccines for their safety and efficacy in an unbiased way before their authorization for use.

We will know more once the clinical trials conclude. It's typical for vaccine candidates not to reach the final stages of testing, so likewise, we do not expect 100 percent of all COVID-19 vaccines under development to become available.

How can a safe vaccine be made so quickly?

Vaccine development typically takes many years. However, scientists had already begun research for coronavirus vaccines during previous outbreaks caused by related coronaviruses such as SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome). That earlier research provided a head start for rapid development of vaccines to protect against infection with the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Will more than one dose of COVID-19 vaccine be recommended per patient?

At this time, it's anticipated that COVID-19 vaccines will require two doses separated by 21 or 28 days. The second dose of any COVID-19 vaccine must be completed with the same vaccine brand as the first dose.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Any vaccine or medication can cause side effects. These are typically minor, such as a sore arm or low-grade fever, and go away within a few days. As with all vaccines, COVID-19 vaccines will not be approved until clinical trials have taken place that show they are both safe and effective. Safety is the top priority of any vaccine. Early results from the first COVID-19 vaccines tested in people show they worked as intended with no serious side effects.

Will people who have already had COVID-19 be able to get the vaccine?

We do not yet know whether the vaccine will be recommended for people who have had COVID-19 already. Phase 3 studies currently underway include individuals who had previously tested positive, with or without symptoms, and safety and efficacy data will help inform decisions about whether vaccination is appropriate for them.

How much will it cost to get vaccinated?

The federal government will cover the cost of the vaccine. It is possible that health care providers may charge an office visit fee, or a fee to administer the vaccine. Health insurance most likely will cover these fees. DHEC will work with other state agencies to understand and address insurance-related barriers, and how to make the vaccine accessible at no cost to people without health insurance.

Can any pharmacy or clinic offer the COVID-19 vaccine?

To receive and administer the coronavirus vaccine and supplies, providers must enroll in a federal vaccine distribution program, coordinated through the state immunization program (unless they are part of a national chain that registered directly with the CDC). The federal government will procure and distribute the vaccine and ancillary supplies at no cost to enrolled providers.

Walgreens and CVS Pharmacies have enrolled directly into the COVID-19 Vaccination program with CDC to receive federal vaccine allocations to vaccinate residents and workers in long-term care facilities.



Visit scdhec.gov/COVID19vaccine for more information.