

ASK THE EXPERT



The latest on the Johnson & Johnson vaccine

The news surrounding COVID-19 changes rapidly. A recent topic? The Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Why do we need a third vaccine option? Is the Johnson & Johnson vaccine as effective as the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines? Are the vaccines that have already been given working? We talked with Mona Chitre, PharmD, to get the latest information on the COVID-19 vaccine front.

Q. Mona, the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine is the third COVID-19 vaccine being distributed in the U.S. Is it safe? Why do we need a third vaccine option?

- ✓ **All vaccines have the same goal – to protect us.** The J&J vaccine was tested thousands of times to ensure safety and is authorized for use in the U.S. It's important that everyone who wants the COVID-19 vaccine can receive it. In addition to the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines, the J&J vaccine is another way to help increase protection against the COVID-19 virus. **Since all three vaccines are safe, the best vaccine is the one you have access to.**

Mona Chitre, PharmD Chief Pharmacy Officer

Dr. Chitre leads Excellus BlueCross BlueShield's pharmacy strategy and is responsible for driving affordability, innovation and operational excellence. She is passionate about access to and affordability within the health care system in our region. She completed her undergraduate and graduate training at Rutgers University and her post-doctoral primary care residency at the VA Hospital in Buffalo, New York.



Q. Thank you for explaining that. How does the J&J vaccine differ from Moderna's and Pfizer/BioNTech's?

- ✓ **The J&J vaccine is a single dose that offers maximum protection quicker than the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines.** The J&J vaccine has proven to be 66% effective at preventing moderate to severe cases of COVID-19. With all three vaccine options, no fragment of the live virus is in the vaccine so the vaccine itself cannot make you sick with COVID-19.

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Q. Interesting. Should we be concerned with a lower effectiveness rate?

- ✔ No, there is no need to be concerned. The only way to accurately compare the effectiveness of these vaccines would be to study the vaccines against each other within the same clinical study. The three vaccines were all studied in different regions and populations at different points in time and measured different results. It is best not to compare the effective rates between vaccines.



The data proves that the J&J vaccine is 85% effective against severe COVID-19 cases, and 100% effective at preventing death from COVID-19. Based on the data, the J&J vaccine is a very safe and effective option.

Q. That is good to hear, Mona. There is talk of a booster vaccine to help protect against the COVID-19 variants. What information is known or suggested about this?

- ✔ Scientists are currently looking into if a booster dose is needed to address variants. **It is emerging science at this time, but it is still recommended that you get your vaccine as soon as it is available for you.**

Q. We know that vaccines were given to high-risk groups first. The data suggests that the number of deaths in nursing homes is going down by more than 60%. Do you feel this is because of the vaccine?

- ✔ **Absolutely. Nursing home residents were among the first people to receive the vaccine.** The data shows how powerful the vaccines are against the virus, which is encouraging to hear. Reports like these make me so hopeful as the vaccines continue to roll out. I'm excited for my children to be reunited with their grandparents and optimistic about the future.



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