

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE

COVID-19 vaccines are a hot topic and on the minds of many. Is a vaccine that was created so quickly actually safe? Can I stop wearing a mask if I receive the vaccine? What will our “new normal” look like? Meet Mona Chitre, PharmD. She’s our Chief Pharmacy Officer and a wealth of knowledge on all things COVID-19 vaccine-related.



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 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. MONA, YOU’RE A LOCAL HEALTH EXPERT. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

- ✔ I am excited and impressed by the worldwide efforts and success to thoroughly research, test and bring to market a highly effective vaccine for the public. The scientific research truly is incredible. The first two vaccines being distributed in the U.S. — Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna — are given in two doses and proven to be **95% effective against COVID-19**.

Q. HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THESE VACCINES ARE SAFE WHEN THEY ARE SO NEW?

- ✔ Great question. **COVID-19 vaccines are being held to the same rigorous FDA safety and efficacy standards as all other vaccines — and have been tested thousands of times to ensure safety.** The scientific technology used to develop the first COVID-19 vaccines is called mRNA. mRNA has been studied for decades and looks at the genetic makeup of the virus, and then uses that genetic code to teach our cells how to trigger an immune response to combat the virus. The platform that is being used to produce this vaccine has been studied and used for over a decade, and developers had a jump-start on the COVID-19 vaccine because it’s a coronavirus which they’ve studied in the past.

Q. THAT’S REASSURING. SO, ARE YOU SAYING THAT GETTING THE COVID-19 VACCINE CANNOT MAKE A PERSON GET COVID-19?

- ✔ Exactly. **The COVID-19 vaccines that are being distributed in the U.S. do not use any fragment of the live virus and cannot make you sick with COVID-19.** The vaccines teach your body how to recognize the virus and then create defenses against it.

Q. WHAT ABOUT SIDE EFFECTS OF THE VACCINE?

- ✔ Side effects are possible with any type of vaccination. **The most common issue is a sore arm, which can happen with most vaccines.** Other reactions include fatigue and headache.

It’s really important to note that the vaccine is not making you sick, but this is the body’s natural immune system response.

Also, I know many people with seasonal allergies are concerned with taking the vaccine. If you have seasonal allergies (e.g., pollen, dust, ragweed, etc.), the vaccine should not cause any issues. But anyone with allergic reactions to other vaccinations should talk with your doctor to see what is best for you.

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