Staff

Frequently Asked Questions – Covid-19 Vaccines

Q. What is the schedule and process for the vaccine clinics at Living Branches?
A. Vaccines at Living Branches will be provided through CVS; persons in Pennsylvania receive the Pfizer vaccine. We have two dates for vaccine clinics: Dock Woods on Saturday, January 2 and Souderton Mennonite Homes on either January 14 – we are still awaiting official confirmation of that date. Residents will be vaccinated on their home campus; staff members can be vaccinated at either campus. Neither staff nor residents are required to participate, but we strongly recommend you choose to get the vaccine.

In an attempt to ensure that everyone in a department is not being vaccinated at the same time, you will work with your supervisor to determine the best time and location for your appointment. Your supervisor will register you for your vaccine using Sign Up Genius, so expect a confirmation email with your time and location. Please remember that vaccines are being administered by CVS and we have no control over the dates or times for the clinics. It is possible the vaccination schedule will not be convenient for you, but please do everything you can to make your scheduled appointment.

Prior to receiving your vaccination, you will need to provide us with front and back copies of your insurance cards. You can email copies of your insurance cards to vaccines@livingbranches.org, or drop off copies at the front desks. For your convenience, if you are being tested at one of the Covid testing clinics, you can make copies there as well. If you do not have health insurance, you can still be vaccinated without any cost to you.

Consent forms will be available for you to complete the day of the vaccine clinic. In order to complete the forms, you will need to know your primary care physician's name, phone number, and fax number, as well as your social security or driver's license number. If you are 16 or 17 years old, your parent or guardian will need to sign the form, so your supervisor will give you a copy in advance to take home for signatures.

Every person requires two doses of the vaccine in order for it to be effective. Those doses should be given 21 days apart. CVS will return to Souderton Mennonite Homes and Dock Woods to provide the second dose of the vaccine. A few days before those appointments, you will be given information about scheduling a time for the second vaccination.

Q. I have additional questions; how can I get answers?
A. Please visit the website at livingbranches.org/vaccine-resources or attend one of our Zoom webinars. You are free to attend any of these sessions at your convenience. If you are at work and do not have a computer, you may use the Zoom app on your smartphone to attend a session. We are making an exception to our policy regarding personal phone usage while at work so you can attend a session. You may also attend when not at work if it is more convenient. The content at each session will be the same, although the questions asked will probably be different.

Thursday, December 24: 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
Tuesday, December 29: 2:00 p.m
Wednesday, December 30: 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m
Zoom Meeting ID (for all meetings): 874 7660 3457
Zoom Passcode (for all meetings): 934872

Q. How does the vaccine work?
A. The vaccine from Pfizer uses a technique known as mRNA, or messenger RNA. These vaccines give instructions for our cells to make a harmless piece of what is called the 'spike protein'. This protein is found on the surface of the coronavirus that causes Covid-19.

Once these vaccine instructions, or mRNA, are injected, our cells use it to make the spike protein; then the instructions are broken down and eliminated. The protein piece is displayed on the cell surface, triggering our immune system to make antibodies against it, just as it would if it were exposed to the real coronavirus that causes Covid-19. In this way, the body learns how to protect itself when and if the real virus shows up.

The mRNA vaccines don't use the live virus that causes Covid-19, nor does the mRNA get into the cell's nucleus, which is where our DNA (genetic material) is stored.

Q. How do we know if the vaccine is safe?
A. It's important to know that vaccines go through more testing than any other pharmaceuticals. Before any vaccine is made available, it must go through rigorous development and testing. Manufacturing is critical — every dose must consistently be high quality. Additionally, extensive testing in clinical trials is conducted to prove safety. The first step is for small groups of people receive the trial vaccine. Next the vaccine is given to people with particular characteristics (e.g., age and physical health). Then the vaccine is given to tens of thousands of people and tested for effectiveness and safety.

After that, the data is reviewed by the FDA which approves the vaccine, and by an independent board, CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) which will make its recommendations for use. These bodies are the final safeguards for the public ensuring any vaccine is both safe and effective.

Q. How could they make the vaccine that quickly and still have it be safe?
A. There are multiple reasons this vaccine was developed both rapidly and safely. They are:

1. Coronavirus was very similar to viruses for which we already had vaccine research underway. Many of the teams pursuing vaccines for SARS-CoV-2 (the scientific name of the new coronavirus) have previously worked on vaccines for the original SARS virus, which caused a 2003 outbreak that killed some 800 people, and MERS, which has caused 2,500 cases since 2012.

2. This is the biggest public health emergency we have had in our lifetimes and governments, agencies, and foundations are all investing billions of dollars to develop vaccines. That level of funding allows research and manufacturing of the vaccine to proceed much more rapidly than it normally would.

3. Red tape in the vaccine approval process is being cleared out of the way. This not the first time that has happened; it also happened during the Ebola crisis. That gave government regulators experience and more comfort with the idea that they could have greater flexibility in the vaccine approval process than they normally would have. For example, clinical trials include three increasingly large phases that establish how safe and effective a drug or vaccine is. But with the Covid-19 pandemic, some of the trials have been collapsed into Phase 1/2 or Phase 2/3 trials. It's a very technical distinction, but it can shave weeks or months off the process by saving research teams from having to write new protocols or get additional clearances.

Q. What are the possible side effects from receiving the vaccine?
A. Pfizer has run tests that include more than 44,000 people. An FDA analysis of the vaccine's safety and effectiveness on people aged 16 and older found "no specific safety concerns" that would preclude the

vaccine's use. Some mild to moderate side effects are common — mostly swelling, pain, redness at the injection site, fatigue, and sometimes fever that resolves within about 24 hours.

You will be monitored for 15 minutes after getting a Covid-19 vaccine to see if you have an immediate reaction. Most side effects happen with the first few days after vaccination and last no more than three days. If you experience side effects after getting the vaccine, it doesn't mean that you have Covid-19. It means that the vaccine is working.

If you have a reaction that prevents you from being able to eat, sleep, or work, contact your doctor. Also contact your doctor if you have a reaction that lasts longer than three days.

Signs of an allergic reaction include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, and weakness. If you have any of these signs, seek care immediately

Q. Who can get the vaccine?
A. The vaccine has been approved for persons age 16 and older. CVS will not be administering the vaccine to anyone under the age of 16 at the Living Branches. The CDC indicates pregnant women may be vaccinated; please talk with your physician if you have questions.

Q. Once I have been vaccinated, how long does it take until I develop immunity?
A. It takes time for the mRNA to deliver the message to your cells, the cells to start making the spike protein, and then for the antibodies to be created. It will take a few weeks after the second dose for you to develop immunity—if the vaccine works for you. Remember that the vaccine has about 95% effectiveness, so about 5% of persons taking the vaccine will not become immune.

Q. If I've had Covid-19 should I get vaccinated anyway?
A. It appears that getting vaccinated if you've already had Covid is safe — in both the Pfizer and Moderna trials, about 5% to 10% of volunteers turned out to have already been infected. Many experts say the extra protection of getting vaccinated might be helpful even if you had Covid-19, because most experts think immunity from having Covid may only last about 90 days or so.

Q. I don't want to get vaccinated now. Can I wait for a later date?
A. There is a limited supply of vaccines available across the world. Living Branches is able to offer vaccines now because skilled nursing and retirement communities have been identified as top priority for vaccine distribution. If you do not receive a vaccine now, we do not know when you might be offered another opportunity to get one. Presumably it would be when they are available to the general public, and that is expected to be late summer or fall at the earliest. We are strongly encouraging all Living Branches residents and staff to get their vaccine now.

Q. Are there preservatives in the vaccine? I'm concerned that I could be allergic.
A. The vaccines do not contain any preservatives, thimerosal, or egg products, so persons with allergies to those ingredients are unlikely to be affected. If you have any concerns, please speak with your physician.

CDC recommends that people with a history of severe allergic reactions not related to vaccines or injectable medications—such as allergies to food, pet, venom, environmental, or latex—may still get vaccinated. People with a history of allergies to oral medications or a family history of severe allergic reactions, or who might have a milder allergy to vaccines (no anaphylaxis)—may also still get vaccinated.

There have been a few instances of persons having an anaphylaxis reaction to the vaccine; epinephrine (what is in an Epi-pen) was used to treat the reactions. Everyone who receives the vaccine is required to be

observed for 15 minutes to ensure they do not have a reaction, but if you have a history of anaphylaxis, please speak with your physician.

Q. Does the Covid-19 vaccine harm my fertility and make it so I'm unable to get pregnant?
A. No. There is no plausible biological explanation for how the vaccine would cause infertility as the spike protein in the vaccine or antibodies to it do not affect fertility. No infertility has been shown among women who have contracted Covid during the pandemic, and the same antibodies are what is developed by receiving the vaccine. Finally, in the vaccine trial with the Pfizer vaccine, 12 women became pregnant after receiving the vaccine.

Q. Is there a cost to be vaccinated?
A. There is no cost to you to receive the vaccine. CVS will bill your insurance for the cost of administering the vaccine, but you will not be charged. For persons who have their health insurance through Living Branches, this is true for both the high deductible and standard plans. If you have further questions, please contact your insurance company. If you do not have health insurance, you can still be vaccinated without any cost to you.