

Covid 19 Vaccine Program for LTC Facilities
Brief Questions and Answers for Germantown Home Employees
12/29/2020 Weekly Update

These questions and answers were compiled by Dr. Mary Schuler using the latest available information.

Q. When will the vaccine come to Germantown Home?

A. Germantown Home is tentatively scheduled to receive the vaccine on Tuesday, 1/5 for its first vaccine clinic. The vaccine involves a booster dose after 3 weeks. A second vaccine clinic will be held 3 weeks after the first to administer booster doses, and to give the first injection to people who missed the first clinic. A third and final clinic will be held to give booster doses (only) to people who still need them. Employees will be notified when timing has been confirmed.

Q. Who will be eligible to get the vaccine at Germantown Home?

A. Residents and staff members who agree to take the vaccine may participate in this program. Participation is voluntary, though strongly encouraged for the safety of our residents and staff.

Q. Who will give the injections?

A. Per the federal government's program for vaccine distribution to nursing homes, CVS will bring the vaccine to Germantown Home, and their personnel will give the injections.

Q. Which vaccine will be given?

A. The Pfizer vaccine. The similar Moderna vaccine is not currently part of PA's nursing home supply.

Q. Is the Pfizer vaccine safe?

A. Large studies have shown a very high level of safety, with no deaths or long-term side effects. Non-serious side effects are temporary, as is true for many vaccines. Serious allergic reactions have occurred in a tiny percentage of people who received the vaccine to date. All were successfully treated per the usual regimen for serious allergic reactions.

Q. Should I take the vaccine if I have a history of allergies?

A. People who have had an anaphylactic allergic reaction to any ingredient of the vaccine should not take the vaccine. People with a history of anaphylaxis from other substances will require additional screening and monitoring. People with certain allergies will be monitored for 30 minutes after the vaccine. All other vaccine recipients will be monitored for 15 minutes, a common vaccine practice.

Q. What are the ingredients of the Pfizer vaccine?

A. Lipids (4 types of fat molecules, one being cholesterol), m-RNA, potassium chloride, monobasic potassium phosphate, sodium chloride, dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate, and sucrose.

Q. What side effects might occur?

A. The most common side effects include injection site soreness and swelling, headache, fatigue, body aches, feverishness, and chills. They usually appear within hours to a day, and resolve in 1-2 days. Similar reactions are common after many vaccines, and are caused by activation of the immune system,

not by illness. Over the counter treatments may be used for discomfort. Side effects may be greater after the second injection. The vaccine does not cause Covid infection. Cough, shortness of breath, and nasal symptoms are not known vaccine reactions, and must be further evaluated if they occur.

Q. Are people with underlying health conditions at greater risk for vaccine complications?

A. There has been no evidence of this. The vaccine has not yet been adequately studied in pregnant and lactating women, although no safety concerns have been reported to date. Pregnant and lactating women should discuss the vaccine with their OB/GYN.

Q. Are the risks of side effects worth the benefit of receiving the vaccine?

A. Medical experts say “yes, definitely” for most people, especially those with underlying conditions. The numbers clearly show that the vaccine is very safe and effective. No deaths or persisting complications have been reported in over a million vaccine recipients. On the other hand, Covid 19 infection has already killed 1 out of every 1000 Americans and has caused tremendous suffering and persisting health problems (including debilitating strokes, heart attacks, lung disease, and chronic fatigue) in many more. Covid infection is highly unpredictable, and can even kill young healthy people.

Q. Can the vaccine be given to people who have recovered from Covid 19?

A. Yes, if they are at least 14 days past the date of testing positive. Infection appears to provide immunity for about 3 months, so people with recent infections may choose to wait. However, the vaccine appears to be more effective in generating prolonged immunity than a prior infection.

Q. How long will it take for me to be protected from Covid 19 after I get the vaccine?

A. Immunity is expected about 2 weeks after the second vaccination in approximately 95% of people. 5% of vaccine recipients may not develop full protection, but may still have reduced chance of serious illness if they become infected.

Q. How long will immunity last after getting the Covid 19 vaccine?

A. Currently it is believed that immunity will last at least a year, but this continues to be studied.

Q. Will this vaccine protect against new Covid 19 mutations?

A. It is believed that the vaccine will offer good protection against currently recognized mutations. Study continues.

Q. Will I still be able to carry and transmit the Covid 19 virus to other people after I am immunized?

A. Possibly. The vaccine is effective at preventing illness, but it is not yet known if vaccinated people can still be asymptomatic spreaders of the virus if it gets into their nose. Study continues.

Q. Will I still need to wear a mask and practice social distancing after I receive 2 vaccinations?

A. Yes, until more is known about potential asymptomatic spread (as noted above), and until a large percentage of the population is immune. Also, since the vaccine is not 100% effective, some vaccinated people may still become ill from Covid 19.

Q. If I do not get the vaccine as part of the upcoming program in Germantown Home, when and where might I be able to get the vaccine?

A. This is not yet known.

Q. Will I be able to get the vaccine series starting with the second rather than first vaccine clinic?

A. Yes. But you cannot wait until the third clinic.

Q. How soon must I sign up to get my vaccine?

A. To participate in the first vaccine clinic, we request for staff to communicate this decision by the end of 12/30, so that necessary paperwork can be completed. Note that CVS will only bring enough vaccine for those that signed up in advance, so you cannot sign up on the clinic day.

Q. Who pays for the vaccine?

A. The government pays for the vaccine, and insurance covers the administration of the injection.

Q. Is the vaccine too new to be trusted?

A. The vaccine has been very intensively studied, with no shortcuts in safety evaluation. Development was expedited due to intensive focus of resources and expertise, and efficiency improvements. The mRNA vaccine technology has been studied for years, without serious safety concerns. Over a million people have safely received the vaccine to date, as noted previously.

Q. How accurate is on-line information about the Covid 19 vaccine?

A. Information posted by the FDA, CDC, well established medical/scientific organizations, and well established news outlets are generally accurate and current. However, many internet postings from other sources are misleading or false, and should be carefully scrutinized. Rumors have caused unfounded vaccine hesitancy. The vaccine does not contain microchips or cause people to get HIV.

Q. May I speak to a physician or nurse practitioner about the vaccine?

A. Absolutely. You may email or call (leave message with callback info if you get voice mail):

Mary Schuler MD, mschuler@newcourtland.org, 215-951-4207.

Archana Arya DNP, aarya@newcourtland.org, 215-951-4260.

People with underlying medical conditions should speak with their personal physicians about any concerns.