



COVID BOOSTER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

OCTOBER 2022

In September, Covid-19 boosters that specifically target Omicron strains were approved and released for distribution. These bivalent mRNA vaccines are produced by Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech and use the same platforms on which the original vaccines were based.

Who is eligible for the new boosters?

The Moderna booster is available for those 18 and over and Pfizer/BioNTech is available for those 12 and older if they have received a primary vaccination series or a booster at least two months before. Children under the age of 12 are not eligible but manufacturers have announced plans to seek approval in the coming months. Children 5 and above are eligible for a primary series and one booster shot, although not the most current bivalent vaccine.

How is this vaccine different than previous versions?

This bivalent vaccine is very similar to previous vaccines with a few key differences. First, the vaccine incorporates mRNA to encode the “spike protein” from the original strain of Covid-19 as well as the more highly transmissible Omicron strains (BA.5, BA.5). Secondly, the bivalent vaccine has a lower dose of mRNA than that used in the primary series of vaccines.

Are these new vaccines safe and have they been tested?

Experts don't expect any significant changes in side effects or safety given how similar these vaccines are to the prior versions, which have been administered millions of times. Regulators authorized the vaccines based on this track record and previous human experience with a reformulated vaccine incorporating BA.1 as well as trials in mice. Human specific trials have begun, and we expect to see results in November. This methodology is very similar to influenza vaccines, which are updated annually and approved before human data is fully studied.

How effective are these new vaccines?

Ongoing studies in humans will help scientists to better understand the effectiveness of the bivalent vaccines. Experts chose to approve these vaccines based on the effectiveness of previous vaccines and studies looking at a reformulated vaccine based on the BA.1 variant. These reformulated vaccines were very effective in evoking an antibody response and preventing death and hospitalization. Individuals who have been recently diagnosed with Covid-19 should consider waiting 3 months until getting a booster, since infection boosts immunity and is protective for 2-3 months.

Can I get influenza vaccine and covid vaccines and boosters at the same time?

Yes. It is very important to receive an annual flu shot each year as experts are worried about a “twindemic” with both influenza and Covid-19. Receiving both vaccinations at the same time is both safe and convenient. The vaccinations can also be spaced out if individuals prefer.