

## 1/23/21 – Important Vaccine Info – PLEASE READ

Hello students,

Over the last few weeks, many of you have been able to receive at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine and a few of you have even received two doses already. Unfortunately, the supply has been limited and some of you haven't gotten your first dose yet, including students who are doing clinical rotations. I assure you that we are working to get all of you fully immunized as quickly as possible. Thanks for your patience.

Now that the vaccine rollout has started, we are fielding lots of questions about what people can/should or cannot/should not do. Here are some answers, based on information I have received from our public health and infectious disease faculty.

Am I protected after one dose?

No. In studies, cohort rates of COVID began to drop 10-14 days after the first dose and there is some immune response at that point, but you are not considered protected until after the second dose, and that protection isn't fully realized until a week or two following that dose. You should get the second dose as close to the recommended 3-week (Pfizer) or 1-month (Moderna) interval as possible (it should not be earlier than that).

Does the vaccine have any side effects?

Common side effects include pain, swelling, or redness where you get the shot, and flu-like symptoms, such as fever, chills, tiredness, muscle aches, headache, nausea, and/or diarrhea. Side effects usually start a day or two after getting the vaccine. Side effects are more common after the second dose. You shouldn't time the second dose to coincide with exams, etc.

Once I get the vaccine, can I take off my mask, sit shoulder-to-shoulder, hang out at bars, and/or have big parties with friends who have also gotten the vaccine?

No. Studies show that people who have been fully vaccinated are very unlikely to have symptomatic disease, but they have not looked at asymptomatic transmission (which is harder to study). People who have been vaccinated should assume that they can still transmit the virus. Until further notice, you need to continue to do all the things currently recommended to minimize the chance of transmission – wear a mask, keep your distance from others, limit gatherings, avoid eating or drinking around people outside your bubble, wash hands frequently, and stay home if sick.

Note also that 95% protection from the vaccine in the absence of herd immunity throughout our community is not enough to ensure that you cannot get COVID. Nursing homes have seen some proof of this already.

How long will it be before we can take off our masks and freely socialize?

It might be many months from now, and possibly not until 2022, depending on how quickly people get vaccinated.

Do I still need to follow quarantine requirements if I travel or get exposed?

Yes, again, because experts don't know yet if vaccinated people can pass along the virus. None of the rules change for vaccinated people.

We all should be grateful for the rapid development and emergency use approval of not one, but two COVID vaccines, and for the opportunity to get that vaccine so we can be better protected in our workplaces. Many people are weary of the pandemic and letting down their guard. We need to stay strong and continue to model good, risk-lowering behavior for our peers.

Bottom line is to get the vaccine when you can and keep following all the transmission-prevention guidelines till the experts tell us we can stop. I better fix the elastic strap on my Green Bay Packer cloth facemask because I may still need to wear it next season :)

Dr. Lesperance