

Frequently Asked Questions | Update on COVID-19 Vaccine Boosters

September 1, 2022

The FDA is no longer allowing the original COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna to be used as booster shots. What does this change mean for UVA Health?

Clinics and outpatient pharmacies can no longer offer booster shots containing the original formulations of Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines to patients 12 years of age and older. (See one exception below.) Existing appointments for boosters scheduled in September should be cancelled and placed on a recall list for rescheduling when availability of the updated vaccines is known.

What actions are needed?

Clinics and outpatient pharmacies that schedule COVID-19 booster appointments should notify patients about this change and cancel booster appointments scheduled during September.

If you receive a request to schedule a Pfizer 12+ or Moderna 18+ booster, please put your patient on a recall list and let them know you will call them to schedule an appointment once the updated boosters become available.

Is there any patient group that can still receive the original Pfizer and Moderna vaccines as a booster?

Yes. Pfizer's original COVID-19 age appropriate vaccine formulation is still authorized for use as a single booster dose for 5-11 years of age at least five months after the patient's primary vaccination series is completed.

Will this change impact patients who are getting their initial series of COVID-19 vaccinations?

No. The original COVID-19 vaccines can still be administered to patients in accordance with CDC guidelines.

Can immunocompromised patients still receive a third dose of the original Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines?

Yes. Third doses are part of the initial vaccination series for immunocompromised patients, a group that includes individuals who have had a transplant or are being treated for cancer.

Does this change mean that the original COVID-19 vaccine formulations are unsafe?

No. The original formulations of the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are still considered safe and effective. The new generation of vaccines are considered more versatile because they target not only the original strain of COVID-19, but also the omicron variant.

Why isn't the FDA ordering a complete shift to bivalent COVID-19 vaccines?

The original formulations of the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines remain safe and effective for a broad range of COVID viruses. The supply chain for these vaccines is stable and adequate, making them readily available to all patients who want them. By comparison, the updated booster vaccines are just arriving in the market, and it will take time for supplies to be sufficient to satisfy all patient needs.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO PATIENT INQUIRIES

Who is eligible to receive the new COVID-19 booster doses?

Both the Pfizer and Moderna updated booster vaccines have been approved for use as COVID-19 booster shots. The eligibility parameters are a little different for each vaccine. Here are the specifics:

- **Pfizer Vaccine** | Individuals 12 years of age and older are eligible for a single booster dose of this vaccine if they wait at least two months after they have completed either their primary vaccination series or have received their most recent booster dose with any authorized or approved monovalent COVID-19 vaccine.
- **Moderna Vaccine** | Individuals 18 years of age and older are eligible for a single booster dose of this vaccine if they wait at least two months after they have completed either their primary vaccination series or have received their most recent booster dose with any authorized or approved monovalent COVID-19 vaccine.

What is beneficial about the updated booster, why is it so important?

The updated boosters are important because they are expected to provide more effective protection against circulating strains.

The most common omicron strains of SARS-CoV-2 all derive from a novel lineage (or parent) of the original SARS-CoV-2 viruses. The novel omicron parent, and therefore all the offspring of the larger omicron family (including Omicron BA.5, the dominant SARS-CoV-2 variant currently circulating), are genetically different from the original strain. As the SARS-CoV-2 virus evolves, new variants can cause infection, even if you've been vaccinated with the original vaccines, or already had COVID.

Updated boosters are expected to provide better protection from current variants.

What is in the updated booster vaccines?

The updated booster vaccines are mRNA-based vaccines produced by Pfizer and Moderna. They are similar in composition to the original vaccines except that they now contain 2 mRNA components of the SARS-CoV-2 virus: 1) mRNA of the original strain, 2) mRNA of the current

circulating omicron strains, BA.4 and BA.5. Thus, it will protect against the original and the new viruses.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-authorizes-moderna-pfizer-biontech-bivalent-covid-19-vaccines-use>

Is the updated booster safe?

The safety of the updated booster has been considered by the FDA when authorizing it for use.

[Here is the summary of information from the FDA](#)

How many shots are required for the updated booster?

The booster vaccines are a single shot.

I got the Moderna original booster previously, do I need to get a Moderna updated booster?

No. You can choose either Moderna or Pfizer updated booster. The primary series and original booster vaccine brands do not need to dictate which updated booster you choose.

I never obtained an original booster of an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna). Should I get one of those before I get the updated booster?

No. The originally available boosters of Pfizer and Moderna vaccine are no longer authorized for use as booster shots. You can only receive an updated booster.

I just finished my primary vaccination series last week; can I get the updated booster?

People may receive the updated booster if it has been at least two months since they have completed primary vaccination or have received the most recent booster dose with any authorized or approved monovalent COVID-19 vaccine.

I have received Johnson and Johnson vaccine as my primary series and have not previously received a booster. Can I get this updated booster?

Yes. Anyone who has completed a full primary series vaccine at least two months ago can receive an updated booster shot. In the U.S., primary series requirements include: 2 doses or more of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, 2 shots of Novavax vaccine, 1 shot of Johnson and Johnson vaccine. If you have received a complete series of an alternative WHO authorized primary vaccine series, you may also receive a booster.

If I have not gotten vaccinated for COVID-19 yet, should I ask for the original or updated version of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine? How many doses will I need?

The updated booster is not currently approved for primary series vaccination. The original COVID-19 vaccines are still in use for your initial vaccination series and have proven to provide broad immune protection against COVID-19. If you are not immunocompromised, you will need two doses of the original Pfizer or Moderna to be fully vaccinated. If you are immunocompromised, you will need three doses of one on those vaccine to be fully vaccinated.

I feel more comfortable getting the original booster. Can I get it?

No. The originally available boosters of Pfizer and Moderna vaccine are no longer authorized for boosting. You may receive only an updated booster when it is available. UVA Health is working hard to provide boosters as soon as they are available.

I'll be travelling soon and want to get my booster shot before I go. Can I get an original booster right now?

No. The originally available boosters of Pfizer and Moderna vaccine are no longer authorized for boosting. You may receive only an updated booster when it is available. UVA Health is working hard to provide boosters as soon as they are available.

I have recently been exposed to COVID-19. Can I get an updated booster?

If you are following a required quarantine, please do not return or be vaccinated until after quarantine. If you do not have to quarantine but are asked to undergo covid testing due to the exposure, obtain a COVID-19 test 5 days after exposure, if possible. If COVID-19 testing is negative after you have completed the quarantine/strict-masking period (10 days), you may get a vaccine. For more information, refer to the CDC document, [Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19](#).

I have had COVID-19 recently. Can I get an updated booster?

You must complete your isolation period and a minimum of 10 days from first symptoms (if asymptomatic, then 10 days from diagnosis) before receiving an updated booster. If you have taken paxlovid, please complete the course of paxlovid and wait at least 4 days after completing paxlovid before obtaining your updated booster.

Can I get an updated booster now?

Not yet. The updated booster is now authorized by the FDA for use in eligible people, but it must be approved by a few more groups and distributed to sites before you can get it. There will likely be a limited supply of updated booster initially.

Can I get a regular booster now and an updated booster when it is actually available?

You can no longer get a booster shot using the original COVID-19 vaccines. If you have gotten an original booster, you have to wait two months before getting an updated booster.