Pastor's Toolkit
FAQs on the COVID Vaccine

CHRISTIANS ? and the VACCINE

Here are some of the most frequently asked questions people have in our church communities. These questions represent legitimate concerns that deserve thoughtful responses. The goal of these FAQs is to provide clarifying information that can help our congregations get comfortable with the COVID vaccine and recognize it as our most direct path to worshiping together again.

1. WHY SHOULD I GET VACCINATED?

Getting immunized against COVID-19 will keep most people from getting sick. Even in a rare case where one does catch the virus, the vaccine will likely prevent you from becoming seriously ill.

Protecting yourself also protects the people around you, like those at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 or those who can't get vaccinated — like infants, or people with weakened immune systems from things like chemotherapy for cancer.

2. IS THE COVID VACCINE SAFE?

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. They were tested rigorously in tens of thousands of participants in the clinical trials before receiving approval from the FDA.

Over 100 million doses have been administered under the most intensive vaccine safety monitoring in history.

3. SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT LONG TERM SIDE EFFECTS?

For every other type of vaccines that has ever been developed, serious side effects typically become within the first 2 months. This is why the FDA requires that all vaccine trials have a minimum of 2 months of data to ensure that no unexpected side effects appear.

Compare this minimal risk to the very real and tangible risk of contracting COVID-19, a disease that has killed more than 500,000 Americans and for which there are documented long term side effects such as fatigue, difficulty breathing, and ongoing pain in the chest and joints.

4. WILL THE COVID VACCINE CHANGE MY DNA?

None of the COVID-19 vaccines will alter your DNA. There has been some confusion because two of the vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) use messenger RNA, or mRNA. The mRNA vaccines do nothing to your DNA, they merely cause our bodies to generate the spike-protein that fights off COVID-19 infection.

5. HOW WERE THE COVID-19 VACCINES MADE SO QUICKLY? WERE CORNERS CUT?

The rapid spread of COVID-19 made developing these vaccines an international priority, unlocking billions of dollars in funding to ensure safety while moving with urgency to save lives.

No corners were cut and no changes were made to the rigorous requirements for safety, effectiveness and manufacturing quality.

The speed of vaccine development was due primarily to three factors:

1. The unprecedented funding and international collaboration of researchers and medical experts.
2. The science had a head start based on research developing vaccines for other types of coronaviruses (2003 SARS and 2012 MERS).
3. The streamlining of certain regulatory steps in the vaccine authorization process (while still maintaining rigorous standards for FDA approval).

6. WHAT IF I'M JUST A CAUTIOUS PERSON? AREN'T I JUST AVOIDING RISK BY NOT TAKING THE VACCINE?

The risks from the vaccine are extremely small and highly unlikely. It is true that you can avoid these minimal risks by skipping the vaccine, but you cannot avoid the fact that doing so exposes you (and others around you) to the much greater risk of you contracting the COVID virus and spreading it to others. We know for certain that COVID-19 can cause death and can also have detrimental long term side effects in some people.

7. I AM PRO-LIFE. SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ABORTION AND THESE VACCINES?

The COVID-19 vaccines do not contain any aborted fetal cells. It is true that there is a tenuous connection between the COVID vaccines and two abortions that took place decades ago, in 1973 and 1985. The approved vaccines utilize what are called "cell lines" grown from this original fetal tissue.

Fetal cell lines are not the same as fetal tissue. Fetal cell lines are cells that grow in a laboratory, replicating many times over the course of decades. None of the vaccines contain any fetal tissue.

In the case of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, a cell line called HEK-293 was used in the confirmation phase to ensure the vaccine worked. In the case of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, a cell line called PER.C6 is used in the manufacture of their vaccine. Both HEK-293 and PER.C6 are used in a wide variety of medical research and vaccine development, including in vaccines for rubella and chickenpox.

These cell lines are laboratory generated and are decades removed from the abortions that gave rise to the initial fetal cells. None of the vaccines are connected in any way with modern abortions and taking the COVID vaccine does not encourage more abortions.

8. HOW ARE VACCINES TESTED FOR SAFETY?

Every vaccine must go through rigorous testing and inspection to ensure it is safe. Vaccines for COVID-19 followed a 3-phase process where there are several stages before FDA authorization:

Phase 1: The vaccine is tested in a small number of generally healthy adults, usually between 20 and 80 people. It's evaluated for safety, dosage, and any side effects. Experts also look at what type of immune response is created.

Phase 2: If there are no safety concerns from Phase I studies, the vaccine is given in various dosages to hundreds of adults who may have a variety of health issues and come from different backgrounds to make sure it is safe. These studies provide additional safety information on common short-term side effects and risks, examine the relationship between the dose given and the immune response, and may provide initial information regarding the effectiveness of the vaccine.

Phase 3: Experts broaden the study to include thousands of adults, from a variety of ages and backgrounds. They see how many people who got the vaccine were protected from the disease, compared to those who received a placebo.

9. HOW DO THESE VACCINES PROTECT ME?

When we get a vaccine, it activates our immune response. This helps our bodies learn to fight off the virus without the danger of an actual infection. If we are exposed to the virus in the future, our immune system "remembers" how to fight it.

Some COVID-19 vaccines use messenger RNA, or mRNA. mRNA vaccines do not contain a live virus — they give our bodies "instructions" for how to make the harmless spike-shaped proteins that will protect against a COVID-19 infection. While these vaccines use a new technological technique, researchers have been studying this technique for decades.

10. HOW DO I GET VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19?

State and local governments will ultimately decide when each group gets access to vaccines based on the local supply. That way, communities can set the priorities that work for them. The federal government does not mandate vaccines or set the rules for each community.

As more vaccines are produced over the winter and spring of 2021, more people will be able to get vaccinated based on recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the CDC.

If you have questions, make sure you talk to your doctor. Some people — like pregnant women or people with certain severe allergies — might be told to wait to get a specific vaccine once it's available.

Your doctor should be able to tell you when and where you can get your shots. It might be at a hospital, the doctor's office, a pharmacy, or a drive-thru clinic.

11. IF I'VE ALREADY HAD COVID, WHEN CAN I TAKE THE VACCINE?

If you've had COVID-19 in the past 90 days, talk to your doctor about when you should get vaccinated.

People who have already had COVID-19 should still eventually get vaccinated to ensure they are protected.

Over the next few months, with more and more people getting vaccinated, we will find out more about how the vaccines protect people who have already had COVID-19.

COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to you regardless of whether you already had COVID-19 infection. You should not be required to have an antibody test before you are vaccinated.

However, anyone currently infected with COVID-19 should wait to get vaccinated until after their illness has resolved and after they have met the criteria to discontinue isolation.

12. WHAT'S IT LIKE TO GET VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19?

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine will be a lot like getting any other shot. When you go in, you'll be given a fact sheet that tells you more about the specific vaccine you're being offered.

Once you've had the vaccine, you will receive a vaccination card with the date, location, and type of vaccine you received. You might also get a card reminding you when to come back for the second shot.

The supply of vaccines will increase in the coming weeks and months. We expect several thousand vaccine providers across the country to offer vaccines — including doctors' offices, hospitals, pharmacy chains like CVS and Walgreens, and certain other qualified healthcare centers.

13. ARE THERE SIDE EFFECTS?

It's normal to experience some mild discomfort following a vaccine. This means it's working and creating an immune response in your body. You may feel soreness or experience some swelling in your arm.

You may also feel tired, have a headache, fever, or chills. These symptoms do not mean you have COVID-19 — it's not possible to get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

These symptoms may impact your daily activities, but they shouldn't last more than 2-3 days. If they continue or get worse, call your doctor, nurse, or clinic.

Even if you have these types of effects after your first shot, it's important to make sure you get the second one, unless a vaccination provider or your doctor tells you not to get a second shot. Ask your doctor if you have questions. Your body takes time to build immunity. You may not be fully protected against COVID-19 until 1-2 weeks after your second shot.

In most cases, discomfort from fever or pain is normal. Contact your doctor or healthcare provider:

- If the redness or tenderness where you got the shot increases after 24 hours
- If your symptoms are worrying you or do not seem to be going away after a few days
- If you get a COVID-19 vaccine and you think you might be having a severe allergic reaction after leaving the vaccination site, seek immediate medical care by calling 911. Learn more about COVID-19 vaccines and rare severe allergic reactions.

14. HOW LONG WILL THE VACCINE LAST IN MY BODY? WILL I NEED A YEARLY DOSE?

Immunization against COVID-19 will help protect you for the near future, but it's still not clear how long the protection will last. We will have a clearer picture of how long immunity lasts in years to come when we have collected more data. Both natural immunity and immunity from the vaccine are important ways to fight COVID-19 that experts are trying to learn more about, and places like the CDC will keep the public informed as new evidence becomes available.

15. WHY DO I NEED 2 SHOTS?

Most of the COVID-19 vaccines require people to get two shots, given 3-4 weeks apart. The first shot starts building your immune response. The second shot is needed to give you the full protection the vaccine can offer. You have to get both shots to be protected.

It takes time for your body to build immunity after vaccination, so you might not get full protection until a week or two after you get the second shot. The different types of vaccine are not interchangeable, so your doctor or pharmacist will help make sure you get the same type of vaccine for both shots.

Ask your healthcare provider about tools (like v-safe) that can send you automated reminders about getting your first and second shots at the appropriate time.

16. HOW MANY PEOPLE NEED TO GET VACCINATED?

Medical experts do not know exactly what percentage of people would need to get vaccinated to achieve herd immunity to COVID-19. Herd immunity is a term used to describe when enough people have protection — either from previous infection or vaccination — that it is unlikely a virus or bacteria can spread and cause disease. As a result, everyone within the community is protected even if some people don't have any protection themselves. The percentage of people who need to have protection in order to achieve herd immunity varies by disease.

17. WHAT CAN I DO AFTER GETTING THE VACCINE?

According to the CDC, you can gather indoors with fully vaccinated people without wearing a mask. You can even gather with unvaccinated people from one other household (for example, visiting with relatives who all live together) without masks, unless any of those people or anyone they live with has an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Because scientists are still learning how well vaccines prevent you from spreading the virus, you should still take steps to protect others in certain public situations by wearing a mask and social distancing.

The above FAQs are focused primarily on medical related questions about the vaccines. For more spiritual questions, please watch and forward our videos linked below and available at www.ChristiansAndTheVaccine.com.