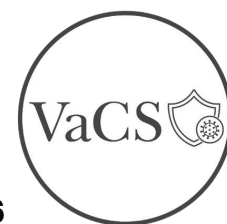


What you need to know about COVID-19 in 2026

The most common questions we've received from community members in the Ithaca area, answered by scientists from Vaccination Conversations with Scientists (VaCS) Fall/Winter 2026



You should know:

- The COVID-19 vaccine is an annual vaccine that is updated each fall to best protect you against currently circulating strains of the COVID-19 virus.
 - If your last COVID-19 vaccine was before September 2026, you're not up-to-date!
- Everyone 6 months and older are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine in NYS
 - This year, major medical associations have come together to announce unified recommendations for the '26-'27 respiratory virus season, which have been endorsed by the New York State Department of Health. (Go to spreadthefacts.org for detailed recommendations)
 - Some pharmacies are restricting vaccination for people 65+ or with an underlying condition that puts them at risk for severe COVID-19, but people that don't fall into that category should still get vaccinated.
 - Ensure you choose a vaccine location where you are eligible

Find a vaccine location near you and ensure your eligibility using our local vaccine finder:



vaccinationconversations.org/vaxfinder

What options do I have?

- Moderna SPIKEVAX ('26-'27): mRNA-based, for ages 6 mo+
- Moderna MNEXSPIKE ('26-'27): mRNA-based, for ages 12+
- Pfizer COMIRNATY ('26-'27): mRNA-based, for ages 5+
- Novavax NUVAXOVID ('26-'27): protein-based, for ages 12+

How is the updated 2026-2027 vaccine different from the original?

As the COVID-19 virus spreads, it can change, allowing it to spread more quickly or become more resistant to treatments or vaccines. These changed versions of the virus are called variants. Scientists updated the 2026-2027 COVID-19 vaccines to protect against variants of the Omicron strain called XFG and expect them to protect against related variants circulating this season. Because the COVID-19 virus strains that previous vaccines targeted are no longer circulating, getting up-to-date is your best chance of being fully protected.

Scientists can change the mRNA ingredient in the vaccine to update its target variant without having to develop a whole new formula. The mRNA carries information to train your body to recognize and fight the COVID-19 virus when you are exposed to it. Each dose contains small amounts of mRNA, in addition to fats, salts, sugars, and acids, which help protect the mRNA and keep the vaccine shelf stable. The COVID-19 vaccines have undergone clinical trials to test their safety and efficacy.

If I have already had COVID-19, should I still be vaccinated?

It is still recommended to get the updated 2026-2027 COVID-19 vaccine. You may decide to wait up to 90 days after infection for long-lasting protection, as it is uncommon to contract COVID-19 again within 3 months of infection. Getting infected with COVID-19 more than once has been shown to lead to worse symptoms, so protecting yourself now with the vaccine can benefit your future health.

Have more Questions? Contact us to talk with a scientist today!

Call/text:
(607) 229-1760

Email us: info@vaccinationconversations.org | vacs@cornell.edu

Visit our website: vaccinationconversations.org

Will we need to keep getting a new vaccine every year?

 As time goes on and different variants are discovered, the COVID-19 vaccine will need to be updated to make sure we are fully protected, similar to how the seasonal flu vaccine is updated every year.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

 We've come a long way since 2020, when the COVID-19 vaccines were first released under Emergency Use Authorization. But now, over 1 billion vaccine doses have been given to Americans. Because so many people have received the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines, we have the ability to monitor for side effects that would be incredibly rare.

Are there long term side effects?

 Side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are taken incredibly seriously, and cases are reported by doctors to VAERS (Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System). The most serious side effect observed has been myocarditis, an inflammation in heart muscle that is treatable in a majority of cases. This has only occurred in about 1 in 1 million people—you have nearly double the chances of becoming an Olympic gold medalist (1 in ~600,000).

When you get vaccinated, the vaccine components are short-lived, being broken down by your body within a few days. The vaccine itself does not stay with you, only the long-lasting immunity learned from it by your body.

How do scientists study vaccine safety?

 The FDA reviews large studies called clinical trials where thousands of people are given the vaccine and side effects are followed over time, which is standard practice for all vaccines and prescription medications. For example, in Pfizer's pediatric 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial, 4600 kids ages 5-11 were enrolled and their safety was monitored over time; 3100 received the vaccine and the rest were given a placebo (non-vaccine) control. After two doses, they found that the vaccine was 91% effective in preventing COVID-19 by comparing vaccinated kids to kids that received the placebo in the study.

Can I get the flu vaccine and the COVID vaccine at the same time?

 Yes, it is convenient and easy to get both vaccines at the same time, but it is also fine to get them separately. There have been large-scale studies showing no increase in adverse reactions when getting both vaccines at the same appointment

Vaccinate now to protect yourself from possible effects of COVID-19 infection.

 No one wants to be sick, and even mild COVID-19 infection can disrupt your daily activities. Older adults are at the highest risk of severe COVID infection; over 81% of COVID-19 deaths occur in people ages 65 and older. While most individuals recover from COVID-19 within a few weeks, 8.4% of adults and 1.5% of children have experienced new, returning, or ongoing symptoms not present prior to COVID-19 infection, referred to as Long COVID. Common symptoms include extreme tiredness, memory issues (brain fog), dizziness or lightheadedness, and issues with taste or smell. Long COVID can trigger or worsen conditions like migraines, lung disease, heart disease, autoimmune disease and chronic kidney disease. Vaccination offers the best protection to potentially serious complications due to COVID-19 infection.

For more COVID-19 and Flu Vaccine Information/Resources, visit our website:
vaccinationconversations.org/COVID-19-flu