



ACEP Spokesperson Toolkit: COVID-19 Vaccine

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COVID-19

Toolkit Contents

Toolkit Contents.....	2
General Messaging Guidance.....	2
Talking Points.....	2
Social Media Resources.....	6
Sample Letter-to-the-Editor.....	8
Frequently Asked Questions.....	8

General Messaging Guidance

Now that the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines is accelerating throughout the country, it's critical that patients hear directly from emergency physicians that vaccination is safe, effective and necessary to ending the pandemic. ACEP's official messaging will be updated as we learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine and the dissemination process.

The following talking points provide guidance on our priority messages, but they are not a script—it's best when put you these messages into your own words that reflect the particular conditions in your area.

Be sure to check ACEP's [COVID-19 Vaccine Patient Information Center](#) for the latest patient information and [ACEP's COVID-19 Media Hub](#) for additional Public Relations (PR) resources.

Conditions and concerns will vary by state and community, but your local media is eager to feature local health experts like yourself. ACEP's PR Department can work with you to tailor letters-to-the editor, op-eds, press releases or prepare for media interviews to help advocate for emergency physicians and protect patients. Please email PR@acep.org if you have questions or need assistance.

Talking Points

The following are talking points to use in conversations, media interviews, and social media to reassure the general public that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective, and that they should get vaccinated when eligible.

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective.

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has currently authorized emergency use of three vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. Additional manufacturers have vaccines in late-stage clinical trials, which means that more vaccines could be available soon.

- Clinical trial data and, more recently, real world evidence from frontline physicians and essential workers who were among the first to be vaccinated, reinforce that vaccination is working. COVID-19 vaccines are effective at preventing serious illness or death.
 - Both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were shown to prevent more than 90 percent of COVID-19 cases, and even those that did contract the virus only had mild symptoms.
 - In a March 2021 [study](#) of frontline and essential workers, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were confirmed to be 90 percent effective against infections in real-life conditions.
 - The CDC confirms that the J&J vaccine was shown in clinical trials to be 66 percent effective at preventing COVID-19 cases and 100 percent effective at preventing hospitalization.
- Former President Trump’s “Operation Warp Speed” helped manufacturers’ expedite the reporting requirements and logistics involved in drug development, but every company still had to follow the FDA’s usual rigorous vaccine approval process – no safety requirements were skipped.
- The Biden Administration has issued detailed [COVID-19 priorities](#), including a plan to accelerate the vaccine rollout. Some of these steps include:
 - More vaccination locations. Working with FEMA and the National Guard, the federal government is establishing and expanding vaccination clinic sites. The Biden plan also mentioned mobile vaccination clinics designed to reach rural and underserved patients.
 - More reliable data. The federal government has pledged to provide states with more actionable data on vaccine production and allocation to ease the planning process.
 - More education. The Biden Administration has committed to launching a locally focused public education campaign to address vaccine hesitancy.

Regarding the safety of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine:

Emergency physicians have an opportunity to help contextualize the pause that was implemented in a way that does not erode confidence in the vaccines.

The vigilance of our experts, and the safeguards in place, should inspire confidence. Our nation’s medication safety system is working and even the smallest number of incidents was detected and addressed. The pause gave the experts a chance to evaluate the information they have and they have now made the best decision they can to protect people.

- A very small number of incidents (six out of more than six million vaccines administered to date, or put another way, essentially one in a million) resulted in quick action.
 - The FDA announced in April that it would study six cases of rare but serious blood clots that were discovered in female patients ages 18-48 who also received the Johnson and Johnson vaccine. One of those patients died.
 - The CDC announced it would convene an Advisory Committee of independent experts to discuss appropriate steps to protect public health.
- Unlike the most common clots, these clots should not be treated with typical blood thinners.
- All 50 states paused or recommended pausing J&J vaccine administration.
- The Surgeon General and federal officials have said that this pause will give public health experts a chance to investigate the cases and make appropriate recommendations.
- Other manufacturers have pledged to increase supply to the U.S. but there could be some short-term disruptions. This pause may complicate vaccine distribution to rural or minority

patients, or other harder-to-reach patients that would otherwise benefit from the convenience of the single dose J&J product.

- In late April, following a thorough safety review, including two meetings of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the FDA and CDC determined that the pause should be lifted and use of the vaccine should resume. A warning added to the Johnson and Johnson vaccine that can help women determine if they want to receive the shot.
 - The [FDA](#) determined that data show the vaccine's known and potential benefits outweigh its known and potential risks in individuals 18 years of age and older.
 - Available data suggest that the chance of these clots occurring is very low. Still, the FDA and CDC will vigilantly continue to investigate and monitor this risk.

Emergency physicians can encourage eligible adults to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccination is a critically necessary step in ensuring we, as a society, can help to reduce the spread of the virus, end the pandemic, and return to our usual way of life.

- The vaccine itself is free, although you may want to check with your health insurer about whether they will cover the cost to administer the vaccine.
- While each vaccine is highly effective at preventing serious illness from the virus, they should not be considered treatment if you currently have COVID-19. If you do contract the virus, you still need to see a physician to get proper treatment.
- While individuals who come to the emergency department or an urgent care center may be vaccinated during a visit for another issue, it may be easier for your primary care provider, pharmacist, or local health department to follow up with you about getting the second dose.
- The list of qualified health professionals who can administer the vaccine has recently been [expanded](#) to include emergency medical technicians (EMTs), among others.
- Emergency department-specific guidelines for vaccinations are under discussion with the CDC.

States continue to expand vaccine eligibility criteria. Today, everyone over the age of 16, in all 50 states, is eligible for the vaccine.

- The federal government stretched their initial goal to administer 100 million vaccines in the first 100 days of the new Biden Administration. In March, the president doubled that objective to 200 million vaccines. This should be considered a starting point rather than a finish line.
- As of April 2021, President Biden has declared that every adult (16+) is now eligible to receive the vaccine. Over 80 percent of seniors and nearly 50 percent of adults have had at least one dose.
- Researchers are studying the vaccine safety and efficacy for children and pregnant women. Those who are pregnant, or breast feeding should talk with their physician about getting vaccinated.

Despite the small chance of possible common side effects, the vaccine is safe. The benefits of reducing the chances of contracting the virus outweigh potential risks.

- No serious safety concerns were reported during clinical trials. Some participants in clinical trials experienced typical mild viral symptoms including fever, muscle aches, bad headaches, and fatigue after receiving the shots, but the side effects generally did not last more than a day.
- Preliminary data suggests that, compared with most flu vaccines, the COVID-19 shots have a somewhat higher rate of such reactions, which can be normal signs that the body's immune response is kicking in.

- Those with a history of significant allergic reactions or previous anaphylaxis should check with their physician before receiving the vaccine.

Researchers and government officials will continue to monitor those who have received the vaccine to study potential side-effects and see if adjustments need to be made to the current vaccine recommendations.

- One of these systems is the CDC's voluntary [V-SAFE program](#).
- V-SAFE will use text messaging and web surveys for the CDC to check in with those who received the COVID-19 vaccine to see if health problems arose following vaccination.
- The system also will follow up via phone with anyone who reports medically-significant side effects.

We will continue to learn more about this virus together.

- The spread of new strains, or variants, of COVID is concerning. Physicians and other experts will continue gathering data to inform the most effective approaches to treatment. Available vaccines may work against some variants but not others. The data are still emerging.
- A virus can replicate or change as it spreads from person to person. The best protection against new strains is to slow the spread.
- We can all contribute to that goal by getting the vaccine when it is available and taking the precautions that are already proven to work; regular hand washing, wearing masks in public spaces, and social distancing whenever possible.

Once you get vaccinated you should still take precautions.

- It takes several weeks for your body to build an adequate protective response, so you will need to continue pre-vaccine mitigation efforts during this transition time.
- In addition, it is possible for those who have been vaccinated to get infected without developing symptoms and unknowingly transmit the virus to others.
- People are considered “fully vaccinated” two weeks after the second dose (if they took one of the two-dose series vaccines) or two weeks after a single dose of a single dose vaccine.
- Initial studies show that a single dose of a two-dose vaccine offers some initial protection, but all prevention steps should be taken until fully vaccinated.
- The CDC says once fully vaccinated:
 - People can gather indoors with fully vaccinated people without wearing a mask. It is also acceptable to gather indoors with unvaccinated people from one other household (i.e. visit relatives who all live together).
 - People no longer need to wear masks outdoors if they're walking, running, hiking or biking alone, with members of their household, or if they attend small outdoor gatherings.
- Fully vaccinated adults should continue wearing masks and stay six feet apart in large public spaces, like outdoor performance or sports events, or crowded indoor spaces, like shopping malls and movie theaters.
- A growing body of research shows that the risk of transmission is far greater indoors than outside. CDC still advises people to avoid medium and large gatherings, crowds and poorly ventilated spaces.

Social Media Resources

The following are sample posts for you to share on social media. They will be most effective if you use them as inspiration or templates to be personalized. Your audience will always respond better to your authentic voice. Each post is accompanied by a supplemental graphic to be posted as an image and reiterate our central talking points. You can download all the social cards [here](#).

SAFE AND EFFECTIVE

As a physician, your voice and perspective add expert authority to discussions about the safety and efficacy of vaccination. Highlighting the benefits that will help allow a return to a normal way of life gives your audience positive reasons to seek out a vaccine.

Facebook

The COVID vaccine is safe and effective, and millions of Americans are choosing to get vaccinated. Each of the approved vaccines will protect you and allow you to safely visit with vaccinated friends and family again.

Learn more: www.emergencyphysicians.org/COVIDVaccine

Twitter

The COVID vaccine is safe and effective, and millions of Americans are choosing to get vaccinated. Each of the approved vaccines will protect you and allow you to safely visit with vaccinated friends and family again.

Learn more: www.emergencyphysicians.org/COVIDVaccine

Social Card

WHY GET VACCINATED?

- ✓ Helps prevent you from contracting or spreading COVID-19
- ✓ Protects you from serious illness or death from the virus
- ✓ Allows you to safely visit with vaccinated friends and family

EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS.ORG

Questions about the vaccine? We have answers.
→ EmergencyPhysicians.org/COVIDVaccine

Download social card [here](#).

WHAT TO EXPECT

Giving people a clear explanation of what they can expect after getting vaccinated can help calm nerves and make it easier for them to plan to get their vaccine.

Facebook

How you get your vaccine varies by state and region, but here's what you can expect once you've been vaccinated. It takes several weeks for your body to build up your full immunity, so it's important to continue taking precautions.

Learn more: www.emergencyphysicians.org/COVIDVaccine

Twitter

How you get your vaccine varies by state and region, but here's what you can expect once you've been vaccinated. It takes several weeks for your body to build up your full immunity, so it's important to continue taking precautions.

Learn more: www.emergencyphysicians.org/COVIDVaccine

Social Card

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER VACCINATION?

- 1 Building Immunity**
You may experience some side effects. These are normal signs that your body is building up your protection.
- 2 Safely Visit**
Two weeks after your final dose, you may safely travel and visit other fully vaccinated people indoors.
- 3 Keep Up Safety**
Continue taking precautions. Wear a mask when in public and indoors, and avoid crowded gatherings.

EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS.ORG

Questions about the vaccine? We have answers.
→ EmergencyPhysicians.org/COVIDVaccine

Download social card [here](#).

ASK ME ANYTHING

Each person who hasn't yet felt ready to get vaccinated may have a different set of concerns or questions. Being open and available can go a long way to helping someone reach a level of comfort where they will decide to get vaccinated.

Facebook

Do you still have questions about the COVID vaccine? Feel free to reach out and I'll do my best to answer them. You can also check ACEP's Vaccine Information Center for more information: www.emergencyphysicians.org/COVIDVaccine

Twitter

Do you still have questions about the COVID vaccine? Feel free to reach out and I'll do my best to answer them. You can also check the @EmergencyDocs Vaccine Information Center for more information: www.emergencyphysicians.org/COVIDVaccine

Sample Letter-to-the-Editor

You should personalize and tailor the sample letter-to-the-editor for local media. Typical word count for letters is around 150 words. The most effective approach is to write in direct response to a relevant article written by that publication within seven days. The [ACEP Public Relations team](#) can assist with customizing the letter and identifying appropriate contact emails for news outlets in your community.

Dear Editor,

As an emergency physician in [location name], I'm grateful that I received the COVID-19 vaccine so I can stay protected and continue to treat patients in our community.

The data from clinical trials and our real-world experience shows that vaccines are safe and effective. Still, we all need to continue to practice the safe behaviors that we know prevent people from getting or spreading the virus. After receiving the vaccine, everyone should continue to follow local guidelines including wearing a mask in public and social distancing.

Vaccination is a necessary step in ensuring we can help to reduce the spread of the virus, end the pandemic, and return to our usual way of life.

[NAME] is an emergency physician practicing in [CITY, STATE] and a member of [ACEP CHAPTER]

Frequently Asked Questions

The following is a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document to provide additional, more in-depth answers for patients about the COVID-19 vaccine. You can also find the FAQ on ACEP's COVID-19 Vaccine Patient Information Center: www.emergencyphysicians.org/COVIDVaccine.

How will the COVID vaccination be given?

The available vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna require two doses, 21 and 28 days apart respectively. You need to get the same subsequent vaccine injection (either Pfizer or Moderna) each time. If you miss the exact date for your second injection, you should get it as soon as possible. You can expect your immunity to become active two or three weeks after the second injection.

The Johnson and Johnson vaccine requires only one dose. It is expected that in the coming months additional vaccines from other companies will also be available.

Scientists are investigating how long immunity lasts and if people will need a “booster” in a year or so.

While the Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna vaccines are highly effective at preventing serious illness from the virus, they should not be considered treatment if you currently have COVID-19. If you do [contract the virus](#), you still need to see a medical provider to get proper treatment.

When will it be available to the broader public?

The vaccine is being made broadly available to the general public in late April, depending on the volume of the nation’s supply. By late spring/early summer, we may see at least two or three more vaccines to be available.

The safety and efficacy for children and pregnant adults is still being studied. Those who are pregnant or breast feeding should talk with their physician about getting vaccinated.

Where can I get the vaccine?

While individuals who come to the emergency department or an urgent care center for another issue may be vaccinated while there, it may be easier for your primary care provider, pharmacist, or local health department to follow up with you about getting the second dose.

Can I choose which vaccine I get?

This depends on a number of factors, including the supply in your area at the time you’re vaccinated and whether certain vaccines are found to be more effective in certain populations, such as older adults.

Is it free?

Yes, the vaccine itself is free, although you may want to check with your health insurer about whether they will cover the cost to administer the vaccine.

How do I know it’s safe and effective?

As with all vaccines, clinical trials rigorously evaluated the COVID-19 vaccine to generate scientific data and other information for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to determine their safety and effectiveness. The vaccines prevented more than 90 percent of COVID-19 cases, and even those that did contract the virus only had mild symptoms.

While “Project Warp Speed” removed the barriers and time associated with reporting and other logistical barriers, the companies still had to follow the FDA’s usual vaccine approval process to ensure they provide the appropriate protections and meet all required safety measures. Each company’s application to the FDA included two months of follow-up safety data from Phase 3 of clinical trials conducted by universities and other independent bodies. In that phase, tens of thousands of volunteers got a vaccine and waited to see if they became infected, compared with others who received a placebo. No serious safety concerns were reported in any of the vaccines.

Even after a vaccine is authorized or approved for use, there are vaccine safety monitoring systems that watch for adverse events or possible side effects. This continued monitoring can pick up on possible side effects that may not have been seen in clinical trials. If an unexpected adverse event is detected, experts quickly study it further to assess whether it is a true safety concern. Experts then decide whether changes are needed in the vaccine recommendations.

One of these systems is the CDC's voluntary [V-SAFE program](#). V-SAFE will use text messaging and web surveys for the CDC to check in with those who received the COVID-19 vaccine to see if health problems arose following vaccination. The system also will follow up via phone with anyone who reports medically significant side effects.

What are the side effects?

Some participants in both Pfizer's, Moderna's and Johnson and Johnson's trials experienced typical mild viral symptoms including fever, muscle aches, bad headaches, and fatigue after receiving the shots, but the side effects generally did not last more than a day. You may have stronger symptoms 24 hours after the second dose. Preliminary data suggests that, compared with most flu vaccines, the COVID-19 shots have a somewhat higher rate of such reactions, which are almost always normal signs that the body's immune response is kicking in.

A small number of those first vaccinated had an allergic reaction following the injection. Therefore, we recommend that those with a history of significant allergic reactions or anaphylaxis check with their physicians before receiving the vaccine.

Researchers and government officials will continue to monitor those who have received the vaccine to study potential side-effects and determine if we need to adjust our current vaccine recommendations. Despite the chance of possible side effects, the vaccine is a safe and critically necessary step in ensuring we, as a society, can help to reduce the spread of the virus, end of this pandemic, and return to our usual way of life.

Is one vaccine better than another?

Each authorized vaccine has been proven safe and effective. Each vaccine has been proven to protect people against serious illness, death and hospitalization. The data supports all three of them and the most important thing is to get the vaccine available to you. Every vaccine is much more protection than no vaccine at all.

Supplies are too scarce in many places for people to be offered a choice at this time. A person can receive any of the three authorized vaccines, but do not mix and match. If a person gets two doses, each should be made by the same manufacturer.

Vaccine efficacy thus far has been very high and nearly equivalent. Pfizer has shown to be 95 percent effective at preventing COVID symptomatic infection after two doses and the Moderna vaccine has proven to be 94.1 percent effective at preventing symptomatic infection after the second dose.

In phase 3 clinical trial, the Johnson and Johnson vaccine was shown to be 85 percent effective against serious illness, 66 percent effective in preventing moderate and severe COVID-19 disease, and 100 percent effective in preventing death. A true head-to-head comparison of the three authorized vaccines is challenging because each clinical trial was designed slightly differently.

While the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccines use messenger RNA (mRNA), the Johnson & Johnson vaccine uses harmless pieces of adenovirus (the type of virus that typically causes colds) instead of mRNA.

Researchers have not yet determined whether the vaccines prevent getting or spreading asymptomatic infection. While some vaccines have been demonstrated to be effective against some variant strains, efficacy against variant strains is still being studied.

I had COVID-19 already. Do I need the vaccine?

Yes, you should still plan on getting the vaccine, but you should wait until those with a greater health risk receive theirs first. Although people who have contracted the virus do have immunity—called natural immunity—it is unclear how long it lasts. Some early evidence seems to suggest that natural immunity may not last very long. Regarding vaccination, we won't know how long immunity lasts until we have more data on how well the vaccine works.

After I get vaccinated, can I still spread the virus?

The Pfizer, Moderna and J&J vaccines are very effective at preventing serious illness from the virus, however, it is possible for those who have been vaccinated to get infected without developing symptoms and unknowingly transmit the virus to others.

Once I get vaccinated, do I still need to wear a mask and socially distance from others?

Yes, once you get vaccinated you should still plan to [wear a protective mask](#) when in public and [avoid close contact with others](#). It takes several weeks for your body to build an adequate protective response, so you will need to continue pre-vaccine mitigation efforts during this transition time. Experts need to understand more about the protection that the COVID-19 vaccine provides before making a recommendation about when you no longer need to wear a mask and socially distance even after your immunity kicks in due to the silent transmission factor. Other elements, including how many people get vaccinated and how the virus is spreading in communities, will also affect this decision.

How many people need to get vaccinated to have herd immunity?

Experts do not yet know 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.

Where should I go if I have more questions?

You can visit ACEP's [COVID-19 Vaccine Patient Information Center](#), the [CDC's COVID-19 vaccine page](#), or visit the website of your state's department of health if you have additional questions.