COVID-19 Vaccine Booster Dose

This document includes information regarding first booster dose recommendations. If you are currently eligible for your second booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine and would like more information, please visit the North Dakota Department of Health’s Second Booster Dose FAQ.

What is a booster dose?

A booster dose is a dose of vaccine that is given after the initial completion of a vaccine series. Typically, individuals have an adequate immune response after receiving their original vaccine series; however, that weakens over time. A booster dose is given to strengthen the immune response and prolong the protection provided by the vaccine. Receiving booster doses is not a new practice. A majority of the United States public has likely received a booster dose of other routinely recommended vaccines (i.e., polio, tetanus) in their lifetime.

Receiving your COVID-19 vaccine booster dose when you become eligible ensures that you are staying up to date on your COVID-19 vaccinations. Staying up to date on your vaccinations helps to lower your risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 infection.

Who is eligible for a booster dose?

There are a few factors that can help you determine whether you are eligible for your COVID-19 vaccine booster. These factors include your age, when you completed your primary series, and if you have an immunocompromising condition. All individuals ages 5 years and older are currently eligible for a booster dose. Please use the information below to determine when to receive your booster dose.

All individuals ages 5-11 years who initially received a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine should receive a Pfizer booster at least 5 months after the completion of their 2-dose primary series.

➢ Moderately or severely immunocompromised individuals should receive their booster dose at least 3 months after their 3-dose primary series.

All individuals ages 12-17 years who initially received a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine should receive a Pfizer booster at least 5 months after the completion of their primary series.

➢ Moderately or severely immunocompromised individuals should receive their booster dose at least 3 months after their 3-dose primary series.

All individuals ages 18 years and older who initially received a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine should receive a booster dose of an mRNA* (Pfizer or Moderna) COVID-19 at least 5 months after the completion of their primary series.

➢ Moderately or severely immunocompromised individuals should receive their booster dose at least 3 months after their 3-dose primary series.
All individuals ages 18 years and older who initially received a Moderna COVID-19 vaccine should receive a booster dose of an mRNA* (Pfizer or Moderna) COVID-19 at least 5 months after the completion of their primary series.

➢ Moderately or severely immunocompromised individuals should receive their booster dose at least 3 months after their 3-dose primary series.

All individuals ages 18 years and older who initially received a Johnson & Johnson* COVID-19 vaccine should receive a booster dose of an mRNA* (Pfizer or Moderna) COVID-19 vaccine at least 2 months after their primary dose.

➢ Moderately or severely immunocompromised individuals should receive their booster dose at least 2 months after their 2-dose primary series.

*All individuals are strongly recommended to receive their primary vaccination series and booster dose(s) of an mRNA (Pfizer or Moderna) COVID-19 vaccine over the use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. This change in guidance comes after reviewing data finding an increased risk of Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia associated with those who have received the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.

**IMPORTANT UPDATE:** Certain populations are now eligible for a second booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine. To determine if you are now eligible for a second booster dose please visit the North Dakota Department of Health’s [Second Booster Dose FAQ](https://www.nd.gov/health/covid-19/second-booster-dose-faq).

**Do I have to receive the same brand of booster dose as my primary series?**

Currently, individuals 5-17 years of age are only eligible to receive a single dose of Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine as their booster dose at least 5 months after the completion of their primary series.

The CDC recommends that all individuals ages 18 years and older receive an mRNA (Pfizer or Moderna) COVID-19 vaccine as their COVID-19 booster dose. All individuals are now recommended to receive a primary vaccination series and booster dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine over the use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. This change in guidance comes after reviewing data finding an increased risk of Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia associated with those who have received the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine.

However, all individuals ages 18 years and older may choose which vaccine they receive as a booster dose. When deciding which booster dose to receive you should weigh benefits with risks. Please see the [mixed dose series FAQ](https://www.nd.gov/health/covid-19/mixed-dose-series-faq) to make an informed decision.

**Why is a booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine recommended?**
Receiving a COVID-19 booster dose when eligible allows individuals to stay up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines. COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness against infection (having symptoms of COVID-19) has declined over time and also possibly due to the Delta and Omicron variants. Effectiveness remains high against severe infection (hospitalization and death) but is starting to decline in older individuals.

Data from Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson clinical trials indicates an improved immune response after a booster dose, likely providing improved protection against COVID-19. Additionally, data from Israel show Pfizer booster doses reducing infections and severe illness. Data from the clinical trials and Israel indicate that side effects from a booster dose are similar to what is seen after second doses of the mRNA vaccines, or first dose of Johnson and Johnson are administered.

The recent emergence of the Omicron variant (B.1.1.529) further emphasizes the importance of vaccination, boosters, and prevention efforts needed to protect against severe COVID-19. Early data from South Africa suggest increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant and reduced effectiveness from the primary series to protect against hospitalizations. Preliminary data suggests that receiving a booster dose increases immunity against hospitalization from COVID-19 to almost 90%.

**Do I have to be an essential worker to receive a booster dose?**

No. Anyone, regardless of occupation, who is 5 years or older is recommended to receive a booster dose. Certain occupations may place someone at higher risk for COVID-19 exposure and should consider receiving a booster dose. These occupations include:

- First responders (health care workers, firefighters, police, congregate care staff)
- Education staff (teachers, support staff, daycare workers)
- Food and agriculture workers
- Manufacturing workers
- Corrections workers
- U.S. Postal Service workers
- Public transit workers
- Grocery store workers

**Do I need proof of an underlying health condition or proof of my occupation to receive a booster dose?**

No. Having an underlying health condition or working a high-risk occupation is NOT a requirement to receive a booster dose. Anyone ages 5 and older who has met the minimum time interval since their primary series can receive a booster.
Does this mean COVID-19 vaccines are not effective?

This recommendation does not mean that COVID-19 vaccines are not working. Hospitalization rates are **10-22 times higher** in unvaccinated adults compared to vaccinated adults. Vaccinated people are **five times less likely** to get sick from COVID-19 than those who are unvaccinated.

Vaccine effectiveness has declined against infection (having COVID-19 symptoms) but is still highly protective against hospitalization and death. Effectiveness against hospitalization has declined for older individuals.

Is a booster dose different from an additional dose?

Yes. People who are **moderately to severely immunocompromised** are recommended to receive an **additional dose** of either the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. The additional dose is given at least 28 days after completion of the initial series. Immunocompromised individuals never achieved high protection with the initial vaccine series and an additional dose to achieve higher protection. These individuals are encouraged to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations due to their high risk for severe illness, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19.

Do I need a booster dose after my additional dose?

Yes. Individuals ages 5 years and older who are **moderately to severely immunocompromised** and received an additional dose should receive a booster dose at least 3 months after their additional dose.

Moderately or severely immunocompromised individuals ages 12 years or older are now also recommended to receive a **second booster dose** at least 4 months after their first booster dose. Please visit the North Dakota Department of Health’s [Second Booster Dose FAQ](#) for more information or speak with a trusted health care provider.

Do I need a booster dose to be considered fully vaccinated?

No. For public health purposes, people are considered **fully vaccinated** two weeks after receiving two doses of Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine or one dose of Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.

However, **staying up to date** on your COVID-19 vaccinations is the best way to protect yourself against severe COVID-19 illness, hospitalization, and death. In order to be **up to date** on your COVID-19 vaccinations you must complete your primary series and all recommended booster doses when eligible.
Where can I get vaccinated?

Information on COVID-19 vaccine providers and clinics near you can be found on the NDDoH COVID Vaccine Locator page. You can also contact the NDDoH Hotline at 1.866.207.2880 for assistance.