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The following commonly asked questions and facts on COVID-19 vaccines has been compiled by Mark Arredondo, MD, Portage County Health District Medical Director. This is the second set of Questions/Facts in this series. Each set of Questions/Facts can be found on our website at www.portagehealth.net/COVID-19/VaccineInformation.

1) Am I able to take the COVID-19 vaccine if I am pregnant?

None of the COVID-19 vaccines have been tested in pregnant individuals. Typically, vaccine (and medication) companies are reluctant to include pregnant people in initial clinical trials for fear of causing injury to a developing baby or threatening a pregnancy.

There is limited data from animal developmental and reproductive toxicity studies with the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines but there were no safety concerns demonstrated in those studies.

Currently, the CDC's assessment is that pregnant individuals should be informed that the COVID-19 vaccine has not been tested in pregnant individuals, but they should be offered an opportunity to receive the vaccine since they are at higher risk for COVID-19 complications.

2) Am I able to take the COVID-19 vaccine if I am breast-feeding?

None of the COVID-19 vaccines have been tested in individuals who are breast-feeding, but the CDC has stated that those who are breast-feeding are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination and may be vaccinated if they wish (for example, healthcare workers in phase 1A who are breast-feeding).

3) Are COVID-19 vaccinations available to children?

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is authorized by the FDA for people who are 16 years of age and older (the Moderna vaccine is only authorized for people who are 18 years and older).

Both Pfizer and Moderna currently have trials underway to study their vaccines in adolescents ages 12 and up, and their hope is to have enough data to prove the safety and effectiveness of their vaccine by the summer of 2021.

There will also need to be work done to figure out what vaccine dose is appropriate and tolerated by younger children as compared to adults, called dose de-escalation.

4) Can individuals who are immunocompromised receive the COVID-19 vaccination?

People who require medications to suppress their immune system, such as recipients of organ transplants, may be vaccinated as long as they do not have any other medical condition for which the vaccine is contraindicated.

Pfizer did have some clinical trial volunteers who were HIV-positive with stable infections, but there is not enough data at this time to do an analysis for this population.

The CDC stated that immunocompromised individuals can be vaccinated, but they should be counseled that the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine is still unclear, and they should continue to take measures to protect themselves against infection even after the completion of the vaccination series.

5) Can individuals who recently received or who plan to soon receive another vaccine be vaccinated for COVID-19?

Due to further studies needing to be conducted to make sure that the co-administration of vaccines does not undermine the effectiveness of either vaccine, the CDC is recommending that individuals not receive any other vaccine either two weeks before or after the COVID-19 vaccine.

If someone inadvertently receives a COVID-19 vaccine within two weeks after another immunization, neither vaccine needs to be repeated, per the CDC.

6) Can individuals who receive their first COVID-19 immunization receive their second immunization from a different manufacturer?

At this time, individuals should only receive both immunizations from the same manufacturer (such as Pfizer or Moderna), until additional studies are conducted to verify the safety and effectiveness of interchanging the vaccines.

7) Are there any known long-term adverse effects from the COVID-19 vaccines?

Due to the short period of study in COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial participants with the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) and the vaccine only recently having been administered to phase 1A individuals, there is limited data regarding any long-term adverse effects.

The FDA and COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers will be monitoring all clinical trial participants for at least two years for any long-term effects, so additional information will be forthcoming.

8) Does the COVID-19 vaccine prevent me from passing the virus to others? Will I need to continue to use mitigation measures after being vaccinated?

Currently, there is not enough data from the clinical trials to determine if an individual who received the COVID-19 vaccine is able to transmit the COVID-19 virus to others. Due to this limited data, the CDC recommends that all vaccinated individuals continue to physically distance, use masks, and disinfect surfaces.

9) If I were to acquire COVID-19 after receiving the vaccine, would my symptoms be less severe?

In the Pfizer and Moderna clinical trials, the approximate 5% of individuals who were fully immunized and acquired COVID-19 only had mild-moderate symptoms, and none were hospitalized.

10) If I miss my second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine during the recommended time period, what do I do?

The recommended time period for the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine is 17-21 days and 24-28 days for the Moderna vaccine. If you miss that time period, the 2nd dose of the vaccine may be given at any time afterwards. There is no need to repeat the series.