Speakers Bureau COVID-19 Vaccine Talking Points

The Basics

• Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is one of the best ways to protect yourself from serious illness, including hospitalization and death.
• Vaccination is also essential to allowing our society to reopen. It is what will help us “get back to normal”—gathering with loved ones, getting our kids back in schools, going to sporting events, etc.
• We know that the vaccines are extraordinarily effective at keeping you safe and healthy if you come in contact with COVID-19. We’re still learning, however, about whether or not it’s possible to pass COVID-19 to others after you’ve been vaccinated. So until we know more, and until more people have been vaccinated, it’s important to continue masking and social distancing, even after you’ve been vaccinated.

Safety and Efficacy

• All three vaccines currently available are extremely effective at preventing hospitalization and death from COVID-19 infection
• The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are both about 95% effective
• The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is 85% effective at preventing serious disease, which is as highly effective or more highly effective than many other common vaccines we use to prevent disease
  – After 28 days post-vaccine, none of the clinical trial participants who were vaccinated had to go to the hospital for COVID-19 infection
• All of the normal safety steps we follow when we create new vaccines were also followed during the development of the COVID-19 vaccines. No safety steps were skipped.
• There are a few reasons COVID-19 vaccines have been made available to the public in record time, and none of the reasons have anything to do with compromising safety. Some of these reasons include:
  – Scientists were already working on mRNA vaccines when the pandemic began—the technology has been in development for nearly 20 years.
  – COVID-19 vaccines became a priority. A lot of money was put into developing these vaccines, and information was shared across many countries and between many leading scientists.

  – We quickly understood how well the vaccines worked because COVID-19 spread so rapidly. With other diseases, it has taken much longer to have enough cases of the disease to see a difference in clinical trials between people who got vaccine and those who did not.

How the Vaccines Work

• The Johnson & Johnson vaccine requires one shot
• The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines require that a person receive two shots, given about 3–4 weeks apart.
• None of the COVID-19 vaccines can give you the virus or make you sick with COVID-19.
• The vaccine protects you by creating something called an antibody response in your body. Antibodies are proteins that fight off infections. Your body uses the antibodies it created after receiving the vaccine to protect you from getting severe COVID-19.
• We do not yet know how long you will be protected from COVID-19 after you receive the vaccine. Studies are looking at this right now.

Side Effects

• Side effects are normal and are expected with any vaccines. They are a sign that your body is responding to the vaccine and building up its defenses against COVID-19.
• The most common side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines are usually mild and short-lived. They include things like pain where the shot was given, feeling tired, headache, muscle pain, and fever. Side effects go away within 1–3 days.
• Some people will experience side effects that are a bit more intense. For example, some people describe feeling like they have the flu for a day or two. These side effects also go away within a few days, and seem to be more common after the second shot. Again, this is normal.

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Eligibility

- New York State decides eligibility, meaning which groups of people are able to get vaccinated, and when. These decisions are made based on who is most likely to come in contact with COVID-19, and who is most likely to get seriously sick from COVID-19. So far, groupings have been made based on job, age, and health conditions.
- You should still get vaccinated if you’ve had COVID-19. We do not know how long natural immunity lasts, and when reinfection becomes possible. This means that the vaccine is still an essential form of protection for those who have had COVID-19 in the past.
- None of the available vaccines have been approved for use in children yet. This is not because we expect that they will be unsafe for children—it is because children were not included in the original clinical trials. Both vaccines are currently being studied in children ages 12 to 16 years old. We will likely know more later this summer.
- People who are pregnant should talk to their healthcare provider about whether or not they’d like to be vaccinated. Pregnant people are at greater risk of serious illness if they contract COVID-19, and should consider their risk of coming in contact with the virus (for example: healthcare workers and other essential workers).
- Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to vaccines in the past, or to any of the components in the vaccines should not be given these vaccines. If you have a history of severe medication allergies, please talk to your healthcare provider.

Access

- The amount of vaccine available is limited. New York State is given vaccines from the federal government and the amount available changes week by week.
- Both New York City and New York State have set up vaccination sites. Vaccines are currently available through hospitals, pharmacies, and the State- and City-run sites.
- If you are eligible for a vaccine, we strongly recommend you get vaccinated. You should take whichever vaccine is offered to you. Both vaccines work very well in fighting COVID-19.
- The vaccines are free for everyone, whether you have insurance or not.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Do any of the vaccines impact fertility?
A: The COVID-19 vaccine will not affect fertility. In fact, during the Pfizer clinical trial, 23 volunteers became pregnant.

Q: For how long do the vaccines provide protection?
A: We don’t know the answer to this yet. We do know that once you’re vaccinated, the protection against COVID-19 is extremely strong. It’s possible we may need to get vaccinated again, or even regularly, similarly to the flu shot. This is something we’re still learning about.

Q: How can we know the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are safe when we’ve never used mRNA vaccines before?
A: We’ve actually been developing mRNA technology for close to 20 years. The clinical trials included tens of thousands of people from all over the world, and from all different races, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Every safety step that is typically followed in the vaccine development process has been followed for the COVID-19 vaccines. When the pandemic began, we were well-positioned to create mRNA vaccines specific to COVID-19. As of mid-March, over 380 million doses of these vaccines have been given worldwide, with over 100 million doses having been administered in the United States.

Q: Can I choose which vaccine I get?
A: Right now, because vaccine supply is limited, we strongly recommend that you take whichever vaccine is available to you. Remember: they are all effective at preventing hospitalization and death from COVID-19.