

Homeless Health Care Providers and the COVID-19 Vaccine

The science is clear: Vaccines save lives. The COVID-19 vaccine is effective. The COVID-19 vaccine is safe. And the COVID-19 vaccine is not the cure. But it is hugely important in our efforts to end COVID-19 disease and protect the people we love.

Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless program's goal is to help as many frontline homeless health workers as possible get a COVID-19 vaccine: As more of us are vaccinated, we strengthen our ability as a community to respond to COVID-19, turn the curve and end this epidemic.

For some of us, however there is doubt, or hesitation. Many people, including those who intend to get the vaccine, have questions about the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine. We've all been subjected to a barrage of information, some historically accurate ([Tuskegee Syphilis Study](#)) and others pure disinformation ([anti vaxxers](#)).

Let's focus on questions around the new COVID-19 vaccines:

How do we know the COVID-19 vaccine is safe?

COVID-19 vaccines were tested in large clinical trials to make sure they meet safety standards. Many people were recruited to participate in these trials to see how the vaccines offer protection to people of different ages, races and ethnicities, as well as those with different medical conditions. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) carefully reviews all safety data from clinical trials and authorizes emergency vaccine use only when the expected benefits outweigh potential risks. CDC's ACIP reviews all safety data before recommending any COVID-19 vaccine for use in the U.S. population. The FDA and CDC will continue to monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines to make sure even very rare side effects are identified.

How were vaccines developed so quickly?

COVID-19 is a type of coronavirus. Fortunately, researchers have been working on vaccines for the coronavirus family for years now. So this work did not start from scratch when COVID-19 appeared and the federal government began work to make a COVID-19 vaccine available. This accelerated timeline has raised concerns for some that safety may be sacrificed in favor of speed. However, this was not the case. Safety remains a top priority; this vaccine has gone through significant peer, state and federal review. Rather than eliminating steps from traditional development timelines, steps have proceeded *simultaneously*, such as starting manufacturing of the vaccine at an industrial scale well before the demonstration of vaccine efficacy and safety. In the past, pharmaceutical companies were only willing to start investing in production *after* approval. This increased the financial risk, but not the risk to patients associated with the vaccine itself.

Does getting sick with COVID-19 provide better protection than the vaccine gives?

Both COVID-19 and the vaccines are new. We do not know how long protection lasts for those who get infected or for those who are vaccinated. What we do know is that COVID-19 has caused very serious illness and death for hundreds of thousands of people. If you get COVID-19, you also risk

giving it to loved ones and the people you serve, who may get very sick, even if you did not. Getting your COVID-19 vaccine is a safer choice.

What if I already had COVID-19?

COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to you regardless of whether you already had COVID-19 infection. However, anyone currently infected with COVID-19 should wait to get vaccinated until after illness and isolation have ended. Current evidence suggests that reinfection with the virus that causes COVID-19 is uncommon in the 90 days after initial infection. Therefore, people with a recent infection may delay vaccination until the end of that 90-day period if desired.

What will change after I get the vaccine? Why do I have to keep wearing masks?

We know that the vaccine will prevent serious illness or death. But we still don't know how much it will keep you from contracting mild or asymptomatic COVID-19 and possibly passing it on to others. So we all still need to practice the SAME precautions as ever: wearing a mask, safe physical distancing, hygiene and disinfecting, until public health officials say otherwise.

Why should I get vaccinated?

All of the above has given us trust and confidence in vaccination — a critical step in slowing the spread of COVID-19 and helping our communities move forward.

Alameda County shelter and outreach providers have worked and sacrificed so much this year to keep our loved ones and homeless community safe. While we know getting vaccinated isn't always comfortable, you can play a big role to protect your family, co-workers and homeless community – and be a role model to those who trust you.

The Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless program -- and the County of Alameda Health Care Services Agency – deeply values and is proud of the unified, community response to COVID-19 that our partners, shelter, outreach, and health care providers have played. We deeply value the safety and health of our providers and our community. One way we can keep each other healthy, support our health care workers, and get people back on their feet is to get vaccinated against COVID-19. When we get vaccinated, we can slow the surge to help our nurses, doctors, schools, businesses and our community.

Where can I Get More Information?

- People's Health Briefing (video) by [Dr. Noha Aboelata from ROOTS Community Health about COVID Vaccine](#)
- Brittani James MD [Let's Be Honest](#) around Black American Mistrust of the COVID vaccine
- Dr. Theresa Chapple's [Simple Talking Points for Black Americans](#)
- Highland Hospital ED Doctors in the NY Times [How to Reassure Black Americans that the Vaccine is Safe](#)
- [Alameda County Public Health COVID-19 Vaccine Website](#)
- California Medical Association: <https://www.cmadocs.org/covid-19/vaccine>
- CDC: [What to Expect at Your COVID-19 Appointment](#)