

COVID-19 vaccine boosters for all adults: What doctors need to know

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What's the news: Tens of millions more fully vaccinated adults in the U.S. are now able to receive a booster dose of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. This comes two months after the booster dose for Pfizer—and almost a month after Moderna and Johnson & Johnson (J&J)—received emergency use authorization (EUA) from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and was recommended by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Under the updated interim recommendations, anyone 18 or older who is at least six months past their second shot of the two-dose mRNA vaccines may get a booster dose, while those 50 or older should get a booster dose. Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine booster already received EUA for all adults two months after their initial dose.

“Mixing and matching” of vaccines for booster doses also is allowed. For example, someone could get a Pfizer booster if they initially received the Moderna or J&J vaccine. Find out what the evidence shows about mixing and matching COVID-19 vaccine boosters.

“The AMA applauds the actions taken by the FDA and CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices to make booster doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines available to any adult who may need one,” said AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, MD. “We believe the FDA's authorization and the ACIP's recommendations in support of booster doses for all adults will help provide continued protection against COVID-19 as we head into the winter months.

“Data presented ... showed that adverse events following mRNA booster doses are similar to or lower than those seen after the primary vaccine series,” Dr. Harmon added. “We continue to strongly urge everyone who has not yet been vaccinated against COVID-19 and is eligible, including children aged 5 and older and pregnant people, to get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect themselves and their loved ones.”

Why it’s important: Allowing all adults to get a booster dose of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines reflects the need to counter waning vaccine protection heading into the winter holiday season when millions of people travel to see friends and family. This strategy is designed to reinforce Americans’ defenses against SARS-CoV-2 and aims to reduce confusion over guidelines that have varied based on people’s age, occupation and where they live.

It is also an attempt to create consistent and clear guidance as at least 10 states—including California, Louisiana, Maine and Colorado—have moved ahead on their own to grant broad access to booster doses in an attempt to stave off a spike in COVID-19 cases during the holiday season.

“The scientific evidence is clear that the vaccines against COVID-19 are safe and remain effective,” said Dr. Harmon.

Many people have already sought booster shots on their own by simply telling pharmacists they are eligible. Yet less than 40% of fully vaccinated seniors—and about 18% of all adults—have gotten COVID-19 vaccine booster doses, according to the CDC.

The FDA and CDC hope this broader recommendation will encourage people who have been confused about their eligibility to get booster doses of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna—a step in the right direction for ending the pandemic and reducing breakthrough infections as well as vulnerability to long COVID.

Learn more: The AMA has developed frequently-asked-questions documents on COVID-19 vaccination covering safety, allocation and distribution, administration and more. There are two FAQs, one designed to answer patients’ questions (PDF), and another to address physicians’ COVID-19 vaccine questions (PDF).

Dr. Harmon urged that “anyone with questions about the vaccines should speak with their physician and review trusted resources, including [getvaccineanswers.org](https://www.getvaccineanswers.org).”

Visit the AMA COVID-19 resource center for clinical information, guides and resources, and updates on advocacy and medical ethics.

Also find the latest information on COVID-19 booster doses from the CDC.