

So I might be eligible for a vaccine — now what?

It's time to confirm your eligibility, find an appointment, and come prepared. In this resource kit, you'll find:

1. When and how to talk to your doctor about your eligibility
2. 3 tips if appointments are hard to find in your county
3. How to prepare for your vaccination appointment: a checklist
4. Expert FAQs.

Talking to your doctor about your eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine if you have pre-existing conditions

On March 15, 2021 the state of California will allow anyone with a pre-existing condition that increases their risk of death from COVID-19 to get a vaccine. The state has listed [10 specific conditions](#) that automatically qualify under this rule. The state has also said that other conditions that increase your risk may qualify you for vaccination at your health provider's discretion.

By prioritizing people with pre-existing conditions who may be at greater risk from COVID-19, we can help reduce the impact of the pandemic and get everything opened up faster.

If you think you may qualify, you should talk to your doctor.

What types of conditions could increase your risk of complications or death from COVID-19?

Conditions that affect your [lungs, heart, and immune system](#) may increase your risk from COVID-19. COVID-19 frequently affects the lungs and the heart, and the additional stress on top of your existing condition could make the illness more severe. Any condition that lowers your immune system's ability to fight illness could similarly cause you to have a more serious case of COVID-19.

It's also worth considering if you have multiple chronic conditions. For example, although the state doesn't recognize hypertension as an illness that would increase your risk of a more serious case of COVID-19, [hypertension in combination with several other chronic conditions](#) could lower your body's ability to fight the virus. Your doctor can help you determine if this applies to you.

You may also be eligible if you are presently undergoing medical treatment which would be complicated by contracting COVID-19.

These recommendations are not medical advice and may not be appropriate for all individuals. Please consult your doctor for personalized advice.

How should you talk to your doctor about whether you are eligible for the vaccine?

If you are able to email your doctor directly, consider sending a note similar to this:

"The state of California has [updated its COVID-19 vaccine eligibility requirements](#) to include people with pre-existing conditions. I believe that my conditions may make me eligible for the vaccine, based on guidance from the [Mayo Clinic](#). Do you agree based on my medical history that I am eligible to be vaccinated?"

What if I don't have a primary care doctor, or don't feel comfortable asking my doctor?

Medical privacy is important, and generally speaking doctors are not to disclose information about patients' conditions except as necessary.

The state [has told vaccination locations not to require proof of any condition](#) in order to get the vaccine. You should just need to sign an attestation that you meet the eligibility requirements for people with pre-existing conditions. If you believe you are at greater risk due to your health conditions and are not able to speak with a doctor, you can still sign that form. Note: if you're getting vaccinated through your primary care provider, they may check your chart instead of asking for the attestation.

These recommendations are not medical advice and may not be appropriate for all individuals. Please consult your doctor for personalized advice.

3 tips if appointments are hard to find in Merced County

Vaccine supplies are still low, and are different in different parts of California. They change all the time! If you checked for an appointment near locations near you, and couldn't find one yet, don't give up! Here are three things you can do today to be ready tomorrow to get your slot.

1. Create an online account with places that can give you a dose.

Taking the time to create an online account with a vaccine provider now will help you start making an appointment right away once new slots open up.

My Turn

"My Turn" is the state-run vaccine appointment portal. It lists supersites and some community clinics. If you're not eligible yet, you can sign up now and My Turn will notify you when you're eligible for the vaccine.

[Register Now](#)

Merced County website

County websites typically include mobile vaccination clinics and other vaccination locations managed by the county,

[Register Now](#)

Chain Pharmacies

Chain pharmacies get vaccines directly from the federal government, and often have different eligibility and availability requirements. Here are the pharmacies with locations near you:

CVS

[Register now](#)

Save Mart Pharmacy

[Register now](#)

Walgreens

[Register now](#)

Rite-Aid Pharmacy

[Register now](#)

2. Set an alarm to check for appointments early in the morning.

Many providers publish new appointments early in the morning. If you're able to check at 7:30 AM PT or similar, you may have a higher likelihood of finding available appointments. VaccinateCA.com updates throughout the day as calls are made.

3. Use an online tool to monitor an appointments website and get real-time notifications when new appointments become available.

One tool like this is called visualping, and if you're interested you can check out this getting started guide: <https://www.maketecheasier.com/monitor-web-page-changes-visualping/>

How to prepare for your vaccination appointment

Prepare Your Documentation

Your vaccine provider should tell you what to bring. Here's a common list of items to bring:

- ❑ **A copy of your appointment confirmation.**
 - An email or similar that you can access via your phone should be sufficient if you do not have a printer at home
- ❑ **Insurance card** (if you have insurance coverage).
 - You [do not need to have insurance](#) to get a vaccine—the federal government will [cover the cost](#) of your vaccine
 - By law, you [will not be charged for your vaccination](#)
 - You may still be asked for your insurance information when you go for your appointment; this information is for the vaccination site to ask your insurer to be paid directly
 - Also bring your pharmacy benefit card if it is different from your insurance card
- ❑ **Proof that you live or work in the city, county, or zip code** (if required)
 - Some locations only vaccinate people in the local community.
 - Your vaccine provider should tell you in advance if this is required. Common ways to prove residency include a utility bill with your name on it, a driver's license, state ID card, vehicle registration, voter registration, lease, or school or employment document
- ❑ **Proof of employment in an essential industry** (if relevant)
 - This may apply if you are a child care worker, educator, food service worker, emergency services provider, health care worker, grocery store employee, or otherwise work in an [essential industry](#)
 - For some locations you may need to bring evidence of your employment.
 - Examples may include a pay stub, work ID card, or professional license. We recommend confirming with your location what will be required
- ❑ **Proof of age** (if relevant)
 - If you qualify for the vaccine because you are over the age of 65, you may need to bring proof of age
 - You can use your driver's license, passport, state identification card, or birth certificate to prove your age

These recommendations are not medical advice and may not be appropriate for all individuals. Please consult your doctor for personalized advice.

❑ Water

- Drinking water after you receive a vaccination can help relieve discomfort
- According to the CDC, you should NOT take a painkiller or anti-inflammatory prior to receiving your vaccine

You should not need to bring documentation about pre-existing conditions.

You should not need to bring a medical chart, doctor's note, or other medical documentation to your appointment. To protect your privacy, the [state instead has asked vaccine providers to have you sign a form](#) confirming that you have a condition that makes you eligible to get a vaccine. That said, some hospitals and medical clinics may request documentation—we recommend confirming in advance. If you are receiving your vaccine via your primary health care provider, they may verify your health status via your electronic patient record.

Check if this is a walk up, drive in, or other type of location.

Some vaccination locations require you to drive, and will administer the vaccine to you directly in your car. Check with the location to see if you can walk up, and make your plan to travel to the location accordingly.

Dress appropriately for your appointment.

Be sure to wear a mask to your appointment. We also recommend a loose-fitting or short sleeved shirt, to make access to your arm easy for your vaccinator.

Make a plan to get there at least 15 minutes early — and to stay for up to 30 minutes after

Most vaccination locations will need you to fill out some paperwork before your appointment. Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled time.

There may be a line for the vaccination itself, even if you have an appointment. It's best to assume the vaccination itself, including some waiting, may take up to 15 minutes. You may be asked to stay on site for 15–30 minutes for observation after your shot to make sure you don't have a rare allergic reaction.

These recommendations are not medical advice and may not be appropriate for all individuals. Please consult your doctor for personalized advice.

After your appointment

Have a friend or loved one check on you

The vaccine is very safe, but all medical treatments have a slight risk of side effects.

You may be asked to stay for 15–30 minutes after your vaccine for observation, because if you were to have an allergic reaction to it, it would likely happen soon after the shot. Most allergic reactions are mild. To be on the safe side, it's good to ask a friend or loved one to check in on you a few hours after your appointment.

If you have any difficulty breathing, vomiting, or feel extremely unwell, call 911.

Arm soreness, tiredness, headaches, muscle pain, fever or chills, nausea, and redness or swelling near where you are injected are all [common side effects](#) of the vaccine. They should go away in a few days, but if they do not, call your doctor.

To learn more about potential side effects, and get some helpful tips, visit the [CDC resource center](#).

Other helpful tips: move your arm and drink water

To reduce pain and discomfort where you got the shot, the CDC recommends that you apply a clean, cool, wet washcloth over the area and that you use or exercise your arm. If you're experiencing discomfort, you can take an over-the-counter painkiller like ibuprofen or aspirin, as long as those are normally safe for you to take. You can get more tips from [the CDC](#).

Schedule a second shot if you need one

If you receive the Pfizer–BioNTech or Moderna vaccine, you will need a second shot in a few weeks. If you receive the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, you will not need an additional shot.

In many cases, the site will book a second shot for you directly, during your appointment. However, some locations do not offer this help, and so you will need to schedule a second appointment for yourself. If so, you can check [VaccinateCA.com](#) to find appointments nearby.

These recommendations are not medical advice and may not be appropriate for all individuals. Please consult your doctor for personalized advice.

The amount of time between doses is different for the Pfizer–BioNTech and Moderna vaccines. For [Pfizer–BioNTech](#), your two appointments should be 21 days apart; for [Moderna](#), your two appointments should be 28 days apart.

Reminder: you are not fully protected immediately after your first (or second) shot

No matter which vaccine you get, you are not immediately protected from COVID–19. Your body takes time to develop an immune response. The [CDC says you should wait 2 weeks](#) after your second dose in a 2–dose series (like Pfizer–BioNTech or Moderna) or 2 weeks after your single dose vaccine (like Johnson & Johnson) before considering yourself fully vaccinated. Even after that time, [you should still wear a mask](#) in public settings, wash your hands, and follow other safety precautions to protect yourself and others during the pandemic.

What to do if your appointment gets cancelled or rescheduled

It is infrequent, but sometimes medical providers run out of supplies to give the vaccine, and may have to reschedule or cancel your appointment.

If your appointment is canceled and cannot be quickly rebooked, come back to [VaccinateCA.com](#) to look for options in your area.

These recommendations are not medical advice and may not be appropriate for all individuals. Please consult your doctor for personalized advice.

Still have questions? Get answers from the experts.

Learn about the vaccine

[How does the vaccine work?](#) The CDC explains how vaccines create an immune response that will help protect you from future infection. The overview includes a description of the differences between the major vaccine types.

[How was the vaccine developed so quickly?](#) Nature magazine explains how the vaccine was able to be designed and produced—safely— in record time.

[Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?](#) The Mayo Clinic explains why you cannot get COVID-19 from a vaccination.

[Is the vaccine safe for pregnant people?](#) The CDC outlines the risks and benefits of getting vaccinated as a pregnant or breastfeeding person in this quick overview.

Additional resources

[The CDC COVID-19 resource center:](#) Get the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control about vaccine safety, side effects, and more.

[The state of California COVID-19 resource center:](#) This page includes everything from case rates to [vaccine guidelines](#) to state policies, as well as FAQs and specific guidance for businesses, schools, and other organizations.

[The Mayo Clinic COVID-19 FAQ:](#) The Mayo Clinic answers many common questions about the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines.

[Know your vaccine rights:](#) The state of California guarantees that you should receive the vaccine free of charge. Learn your rights, and what you should do if you are charged for a vaccine.

These recommendations are not medical advice and may not be appropriate for all individuals. Please consult your doctor for personalized advice.