

COVID-19 BOOSTER FAQ

MANDATE QUESTIONS

Q: Why do I have to get the COVID-19 vaccine booster?

A: As Houston Methodist employees we've made a commitment to offer our patients unparalleled safety, quality, service and innovation. We are mandating COVID-19 vaccine boosters for the same reason we mandated COVID-19 vaccines, to protect our patients, your colleagues, your families and our community.

Q: When is the deadline for me to get my booster?

A: As you read in Dr. Marc Boom's email, all Houston Methodist employees are now required to get a booster dose — by Jan. 31 for management and March 1 for all other employees and physicians. Please read [HR policy 95](#) that outlines the consequences of not being compliant, which include suspension and eventually termination.

Q: What if I received monoclonal antibodies, and I must wait the recommended 90 days before getting a booster, and it is after the mandate's deadline?

A: If your 90-day period is after the deadline for boosters, you should request an exemption for a medical deferral from your [local employee health clinic](#). With an approved exemption, you will have 14 days to become compliant after your 90-day period.

Q: Will I lose my job if I don't get a booster?

A: Yes, if you don't have an approved exemption. Management had until Jan. 31 to receive their booster and all other employees and physicians have until March 1. Those who are not boosted by that date face suspension and eventual termination. We are following the same HR policy for all required vaccines that are not fulfilled.

Q: How soon after having COVID-19 can I get a booster?

A: COVID-19 boosters should be administered without delay once the isolation period is over, unless monoclonal antibody treatment was received. If monoclonal antibody treatment was received, then you must wait 90 days. No negative test is required for a booster vaccine.

Q: How do I get a booster if I don't have one yet?

A: Text "HM Employee Health" to 45991 to register for a vaccine appointment or [click here to make an appointment](#) through the Employee Health Portal. See chart below for locations, times and availability.

| Hospital | Location | Vaccine Availability | Days & Times |
|----------|--|----------------------|--|
| HMH | 6550 Fannin St., Smith Tower, Suite 367 | Pfizer | Monday – Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 3 p.m. |
| | | Moderna | Wednesday – Friday 7:30 a.m. – 3 p.m. |



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|---------------------|---|---|
| Josie Roberts (JRB) | 7550 Greenbriar Dr., 1st Floor Conference Room | Pfizer & Moderna Monday – Thursday, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. Friday, 8 a.m. – noon |
| HMCL | 2305 Space Park Dr., West Building, West Conference Room | |
| HMSL | 16655 Southwest Fwy. Brazos Conference Center | |
| HMW & HMCCH | 18500 Katy Fwy. Suite 3700, Vaccine Center | |
| HMB | 4301 Garth Rd., Community Room | |
| HMWB | 18220 State Hwy. 249 Conference Center | |
| HMTW | 17189 Interstate 45 S. Medical Office Building 2 Vaccine Clinic 1st Floor | |

Q: What if I want to get Johnson & Johnson as my booster, will Houston Methodist be offering that in the vaccine clinics?

A: Houston Methodist will not offer the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. It can be obtained outside Houston Methodist, and then uploaded in MARS to the employee health portal.

Q: What if I want the Moderna vaccine, is Houston Methodist administering it?

A: The Houston Methodist vaccine locations have received a supply of Moderna. When you schedule your appointment in the employee health portal, in the comments section, please request Moderna so the clinics can plan accordingly. *Please note the Smith 3 vaccine site only has Moderna Wednesday through Friday.* When scheduling COVID Vaccine, please specify “Moderna Booster” or “Pfizer” in the comments.

HR QUESTIONS

Q: What if I got my booster outside of Employee Health? How do I report it?

A: If you received your booster from a drug store or other location, you must have your vaccine records as a PNG, PDF, or JPG file. If you only have a paper copy of your vaccine card, you can have it scanned or use your smartphone to take a picture of it and make a JPG file. See more information below if you got your booster vaccine at a Houston Methodist physician's office or at a Houston Methodist site for the public.

- Log in to MARS
- Click on the Employee Health Portal tile
- Log in to the Employee Health portal using the same password as your MARS log in
- Click Other Health Resources
- Scroll down and click on COVID-19 vaccine documentation upload
- Click in the box that says choose file
- Select the file with your information and click Submit

Q: I'm having trouble uploading proof of my COVID-19 vaccine booster from a non-Employee Health location. Can I get some help?

A: You can get help uploading proof of your COVID-19 vaccine booster if you stop by [one of these locations](#) during the hours listed.

Q: I received my booster at my Houston Methodist primary care physician's office or at a Houston Methodist vaccine site for the public. Can Employee Health get my record from Epic?

A: Employee Health is looking at ways that your information could be uploaded based upon your consent, but at this time that is not available. You must upload your documentation to the employee health portal in MARS following the instructions above.

Q: How do I get my records out of Epic for my booster I received at a Houston Methodist vaccine hub or physician's office?

A: Here is a [tip sheet](#) for how to download from MyChart.

Q: What if I got my shot at CVS? How could I download it to share with employee health?

A: Log into care.cvs.com. This will take you to a health dashboard. Select Vaccination Records. From the drop down "What can we help you find today?", select Vaccination Records and then GO. Then click on the needed vaccine record. You will have the option to save it as a pdf for download.

Q: How soon after I upload my booster record in the employee health portal in MARS will my record be updated?

A: You should allow 5 business days for your record to be updated.

Q: How can I check the employee health portal to know they have my booster record?

A: Go to the employee health portal in MARS. Then go to "Most Recent Medical Information" where you can review your immunization records by date.

Q: I'm having trouble uploading my proof of getting my booster from a non-Employee Health location. Can I get some help?

A: We will have technical resources available at each hospital to assist employees who have received their booster outside Employee Health. More information on this will be shared in our HR Weekly that is emailed on Wednesdays.

Q: I am not due for a booster until April 2022. Do I have to get a booster now, or what would my deadline be?

A: Your deadline will be extended from the March 1 deadline for staff and physicians, and Jan. 31 deadline for leaders. Boosters are required to be received by the end of the month that is six months after your second vaccine. Boosters are available four to six months from your last COVID-19 vaccine.

For example, if you received your second shot on Oct. 15, 2021, then you would have until April 30, 2022 to receive your booster.

Q: Who is exempt from getting the booster?

A: If you applied for and were granted a religious or a medical exemption during the vaccine period last year, your exemption is still valid, and you do not have to complete another exemption form for the booster.

If you had a medical deferment last year, you must resubmit a request for deferment for the booster, and your request will be reviewed by the exemption committee. If you would like to apply for a religious exemption for the booster, you may request one at this time.

Q: What if I have side effects after getting my booster and have to miss work? Will I need to take PTO?

A: Yes, you would need to use PTO for this situation if you have PTO available.

Q: If I don't get my booster by the deadline, what happens?

A: If you don't get your booster vaccine through our Employee Health department or submit proof of your vaccine at another location by Jan. 31 for management and March 1 for all other employees and physicians, you will be suspended as outlined in the [HR 95 policy](#). You will have 14 days to become compliant or you will be terminated for failure to comply with the policy.

Q: I am currently on a leave of absence. What do I need to do?

A: You will have 14 days to be compliant upon returning from a leave of absence, just as you have to be compliant with other items like in-services or flu vaccine.

EMPLOYEE SUBMITTED QUESTIONS

Q: I've already received a booster shot. Does this mandate mean I have to get a 4th shot?

A: No, if you've already received a booster shot you are in compliance.

Q: I received the Moderna vaccine and would rather receive the Moderna booster than the Pfizer booster. Can I get a Moderna booster through Houston Methodist?

A: Houston Methodist now has Moderna available for employees. Please complete your consent and schedule your appointment using your Employee Health Portal in MARS. In the comments section, please note if you would like to receive a Moderna vaccine.

Q: How long are boosters effective?

A: A recent [study out of Israel](#) has shown that boosters provide protection against severe illness for those who received them. We do not know for how long the boosters will be effective at raising antibody levels, but the cell mediated immune response should be very long lasting.

Q: I work entirely from home. Do I have to get a booster?

A: Yes, all employees and physicians must meet the mandate regardless of where they work.

Q: Do we know if boosters are safe since we have no real long-term data that says they are?

A: There is no evidence that a third shot introduces new or additional safety concerns.

Q: Will this new mandate change the number of times I have to get tested if I have an exemption?

A: No.

Q: If we are still learning about the omicron variant, how do we know that getting a booster is the best decision we can make?

A: There's evidence from other countries that are ahead of us that boosters are safe and effective.

Q: Will we have to get one every six months going forward?

A: We do not know for sure. We will evaluate this in the future and continue to follow the CDC's guidelines.

Q: Why are you mandating boosters for everyone now when there is a high likelihood that there will be a much more effective omicron-specific variant booster from Pfizer and Moderna later this year?

A: We've seen that boosting has led to a marked reduction in hospitalizations from omicron. Our current boosters are the best available tool we have at this time as boosters will increase your immune response and offer improved protection against omicron. There is also no reason that you can't get boosted again when a new vaccine is made available

Q: By the time that this mandate goes into effect, it's likely that the omicron surge will be over or in decline. Why mandate a booster now?

A: Boosters continue to be the best tool we have against all COVID-19 variants — including omicron. By getting boosted now, we're also protecting ourselves against the next possible variant. There's already word that a new variant has been found in France.

Q: I'm concerned this newest mandate may cause attrition and we'll lose nurses and staff we need now.

A: Last year, 153 employees were terminated for not complying with our vaccine mandate. We've currently had 2,700 cases of omicron among employees, and that has affected our staffing needs much more than last year's attrition. We need to get boosted to keep our staff at work so we can continue serving our community.

Q: Several staff members reported they had a very rough 24 to 48 hours after their second vaccine dose. Most people who have received two doses of Pfizer or Moderna are just getting minor cold symptoms or are totally asymptomatic and can return to work after five days. Why force everyone to get a booster?

A: While we might all hear anecdotal examples of vaccinated people catching omicron not getting very sick, we are seeing hundreds of very sick patients in our hospitals who have been previously vaccinated. There's no guarantee how getting sick with omicron will affect you. The reported side effects from the booster studies are similar to or less than the side effects reported with the second dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.

Q: I recently had my titers checked and they were between 1:450 and 1:1350. Is it really necessary for me to get a booster? We don't do this for other diseases.

A: We know that everyone's immunity to COVID-19 wanes with time. It's not practical to test all staffs' titers on a regular basis to ensure they remain high and have not dropped significantly yet. There is no harm in maintaining higher levels from a booster, and there are no known serious side effects from receiving an additional booster.

Q: I've received my two COVID-19 vaccine doses and after contracting delta last year also got an monoclonal antibodies treatment. Do I really need a booster?

A: Yes. It is our understanding that an additional booster will be beneficial given the data we have on the effectiveness of boosters. The next major variant will likely be a variant of omicron, and we know that current boosters help protect against omicron infection and morbidity.

Q: Many people are already wearing N95s for their patient encounters and wearing an N95 in the grocery store, airports and other public places. Shouldn't that be protection enough in addition to being vaccinated?

A: It certainly helps to wear this PPE, but wearing PPE does not provide the same level of protection as a booster. We all have to take our PPE off when we eat and drink, for example. And most people do not wear PPE 24 hours a day. We are at risk even when we interact with our family members in our own homes without PPE, and a booster helps to provide protection in these situations.

GENERAL BOOSTER QUESTIONS

Q: Who can get a COVID-19 vaccine booster?

A: Everyone 12 years and older can get the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine booster. In addition, moderately or severely immunocompromised children age 5-11 can receive an additional primary dose of the Pfizer vaccine 28 days after their second shot.

Q: When should I get my COVID-19 vaccine booster?

A: If you received the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, you should get your booster five months after completing your primary COVID-19 vaccination series, and if you received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, you should get your booster two months after completing your primary COVID-19 vaccination. The CDC prefers people get an mRNA booster (Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines), as studies show those vaccines provide more protection against COVID-19 and more cases of blood clots were reported in people who got the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Q: Is the booster the same dose as the COVID-19 vaccines?

A: The Moderna booster is a 50-microgram dose, half the normal dose of the primary vaccine. The Pfizer booster is the same dosage as the primary vaccine.

Q: Can I mix and match my boosters?

A: Yes. The FDA and CDC say while it's preferable to use a booster made by the same drugmaker that produced a person's original vaccine, providers can use their discretion to offer boosters made by a different drugmaker. [A recent study](#) from the National Institutes of Health shows that mixing and matching COVID-19 boosters increased immune responses without raising any safety concerns.

Q: Is there any evidence that boosters work to prevent COVID-19 including omicron?

A: Although COVID-19 vaccines remain effective in preventing severe disease, [data from the CDC](#) suggest their effectiveness at preventing infection or severe illness wanes over time, especially in people ages 65 years and older. The recent emergence of the omicron variant further emphasizes the importance of vaccination, boosters and prevention efforts needed to protect against severe COVID-19. Boosters give an estimated 70% to 75% protection against mild disease from the new omicron variant, the UK Health Security Agency reported, citing initial findings from a real-world study.

Q: Are the boosters free?

A: Yes.

Q: What are the risks to getting a booster?

A: Reactions reported after getting the Pfizer and Moderna boosters were similar to that of the second shot in the two-shot primary series. Fatigue and pain at the injection site were the most commonly reported side effects, and overall, most side effects were mild to moderate.

Q: Should I delay my flu shot until after I receive my Pfizer booster shot?

A: No. There is no need to delay a COVID-19 booster or your flu shot, as it is safe to get those at the same time. Here's [guidance from the CDC](#) on that a story on the [Houston Methodist blog](#), On Health.

Q: Can someone treated with monoclonal antibodies get a COVID-19 vaccine booster?

A: If you were treated with monoclonal antibody therapy, you should wait 90 days before getting a COVID-19 booster shot.