

# COVID-19 VACCINE REQUIREMENT FAQ

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

**A:** As Houston Methodist employees we've made a commitment to offer our patients unparalleled safety, quality, service and innovation. The vast majority of us have already been vaccinated but we need to be at 100% to help stop the spread of this deadly virus and keep our patients, visitors and colleagues safe. As you read in Dr. Marc Boom's President's Letter, employee vaccinations are now mandatory. Employees have until June 7 to receive their vaccine. Please read [this HR policy](#) that outlines the consequences of not being compliant by June 7, which include suspension and eventually termination.

**Q: Why is Houston Methodist mandating this before it is FDA approved?**

**A:** This is a much-misunderstood fact. The vaccines all have Emergency Use Authorization, which is a form of FDA approval that allows for the manufacturing and approval of vaccines to be streamlined in a public health emergency. This designation does not mean shortcuts were taken in the research and clinical studies that were conducted. In fact, these went through the same trials that other drugs use in a more traditional approval process just on a different track that is commonly used by the FDA.

**Q: Is it legal to make employees get a COVID-19 vaccine?**

**A:** Yes it is. State and federal employment laws allow private companies to mandate vaccinations. We did the same thing in 2009 with the flu vaccine, and a few years later the state mandated it for health care workers.

**Q: Will I lose my job if I don't get one?**

**A:** Yes, if you don't have an approved exemption. You have until June 7 to be fully vaccinated. Those who are not vaccinated by that date face suspension and eventual termination. We don't know yet if a booster will be required annually but if it is, that will also be mandatory. We are following the same HR policy for all required actions that are not fulfilled.

**Q: Are there exemptions?**

**A:** The deadline to request a religious or medical vaccine exemption has passed.

**Q: Does it matter which one I get?**

**A:** Houston Methodist is almost exclusively offering the Pfizer vaccine to patients and employees. We also have available a very limited supply of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine for those who prefer it.

**Q: What if I want just one vaccine by getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccine?**

**A:** The administration of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was temporarily put on hold after the vaccine caused blood clots in six out of 6.8 million patients. The FDA removed its pause and instead recommends that women younger than 50 be made aware of the rare complication. Houston Methodist has limited quantities of the vaccine.

**Q: What if I get one from the drug store? How do I prove I got one?**

**A:** If you get one outside of Houston Methodist please provide proof of vaccination through the Employee Health portal.



**Q: What is my deadline? And how do I get one if I don't have one yet?**

**A:** The deadline for employees to receive their vaccines is Monday, June 7. This means you should try to schedule our first dose by no later than May 7. Those employees who have not been fully vaccinated by this date risk being suspended and eventually terminated. Text HM Employee Health to 45991 for a vaccine appointment or [click here](#) to make an appointment.

**Q: Will we have to get one every year like the flu shot?**

**A:** We do not know for sure. If boosters are required every year to combat variants and keep us safe, we will make those mandatory.

**Q: Is it safe?**

**A:** The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have been shown to be very safe with very rare adverse effects, just like the flu shot. The administration of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was temporarily put on hold after the vaccine caused blood clots in six out of 6.8 million patients. The FDA removed its pause and instead recommends that women younger than 50 be made aware of the rare complication. The CDC and the FDA will continue to monitor individuals who have received the vaccine to ensure there's no evidence of even rare safety issues. We understand some of you might be nervous about the vaccine but as health care workers, we have a duty to protect our patients and each other, and we would never seek to put our employees in harm's way. We believe getting the vaccine will safely protect you, your family and our patients. Please also keep in mind that COVID-19 can be a fatal or debilitating disease, even in young healthy people. The risks from contracting the virus are greater than the possible risks from receiving the vaccine. See a [comprehensive FAQ here](#).

**Q: Can I get COVID-19 from the vaccine?**

**A:** No. It is not possible to get COVID-19 from vaccines.

**Q: Are residents and fellows considered Houston Methodist employees, and will they also be required to eventually receive a vaccine from Houston Methodist?**

**A:** Yes, residents and fellows are Houston Methodist employees.

**Q: I don't work directly with patients, why do I need to get the vaccine?**

**A:** Taking the vaccine is the smart thing to do protect our patients, yourself, your family and your coworkers. The majority of our employees who have gotten sick with COVID-19 have contracted it in the community, not at work. And remember the more people in the community who get the vaccine the better chance we have of getting rid of the COVID-19 virus.

**Q: I have had COVID, so why am I required to get a vaccine?**

**A:** Due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19 and the fact that reinfection with COVID-19 is possible, people may be advised to get a COVID-19 vaccine even if they have been sick with COVID-19. At this time, experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. The immunity someone gains from having an infection, called natural immunity, varies from person to person and the evidence suggests natural immunity may not last very long in some people.

**Q: Will the COVID-19 vaccine change my DNA?**

**A:** No. This myth may have arisen from the fact that the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines contain messenger RNA. RNA is a type of genetic material, but it's not the same as DNA. The RNA does not enter the cell nucleus, which is where your DNA lives. It does all of its work in your cell cytoplasm. That's the outer portion of the cell. Plus, the instructions mRNA carries to your cells are only for a piece of SARS-Cov-2, not the whole virus.

**Q: I've heard a lot of myths and stories about severe side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine. How often does this occur?**

**A:** Flu-like side effects occur in about 50% of people; they last for a day or so and can be controlled with drugs like Tylenol or Motrin. The administration of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was temporarily put on hold after the vaccine caused blood clots in six out of 6.8 million patients. The FDA has since removed its pause and instead recommends that women younger than 50 be made aware of the rare complication. There are very rare cases of severe allergic reactions, so if you carry an EpiPen or have a comparable history of severe allergies you should definitely advise the vaccination provider of this and potentially seek the advice of an allergist before you get vaccinated. However, few people will be in this category. No other serious problems have yet been shown to be related to the vaccines above and beyond their frequency in the general population. There are very rare risks, perhaps five per million of serious allergic reactions. Contrast this with the risks of COVID-19: 10% risk of being hospitalized and — if hospitalized — 10% risk of dying, and high risks (up to 50% in some cases) of long-term complications like chronic fatigue, “brain fog” or heart problems.

**Q: Are the COVID-19 vaccines that are currently being used in the United States developed using fetal tissue?**

**A:** No. The COVID-19 vaccines that are either approved or up for approval in the United States were not developed — nor do they use in any way, shape or form — any fetal tissue. Johnson & Johnson used fetal cell cultures when developing its vaccine, but it contains no fetal tissue or fetal cells.