



Education | Healthcare | Public Services

COVID-19 Vaccine Update Bulletin

Protecting Kids, Ourselves and Our Communities

What You Need to Know About Access
to the COVID-19 Vaccine and Vaccine Safety

SEPTEMBER 2025

Vaccine Basics¹

A vaccine is a product that trains the body's immune system to protect against a disease it has not yet encountered. Vaccines partner with the body's immune system to protect children and adults from disease, disability and premature death. Vaccines can help mitigate disease severity. They can protect against serious long-term diseases and disabilities, such as liver cancer (hepatitis B), cancers caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV) and paralysis (polio). They are especially important for people who have certain medical conditions that make them more vulnerable to complications of a virus, such as the influenza virus for children with pulmonary conditions.

Vaccines are safe. They are a rigorously monitored part of regular medical care and held to the highest safety standard of any medical intervention. Most significant side effects from vaccines are short term and have no long-term consequences. There is no conclusive scientific evidence of long-term negative side effects. The recent spread of disinformation about vaccines, especially online and on social media, is not grounded in scientific evidence, but in the political and business interests of some people.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND OTHERS WHO WANT A COVID-19 VACCINE

- If you are under 65, check [People with Certain Medical Conditions and COVID-19 Risk Factors | COVID-19 | CDC](#) to see if you are at heightened risk for severe outcomes from infection. The list is not comprehensive.
- If you do not have one of the conditions listed, consider asking your primary care provider if they recommend that you get the vaccine—because you have another condition, because you are at risk for infection at work, or because you want to protect an immunocompromised loved one. Ask your provider to give you a prescription for the vaccine.
- For parents and people who are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning to get pregnant, consider checking with your pharmacy to see if your state has adopted recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and/or American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, or speak to your provider about getting the shot in the office.
- Note that **everyone** was allowed COVID-19 vaccines up until a few weeks ago, except for people who cannot be vaccinated due to health reasons. **Wanting to avoid COVID-19 is a valid reason to get the vaccine.**
- Check the policy at your pharmacy to find out if it requires a physician's prescription or other documentation.

¹ aap-vaccine-SBFINAL_3.pdf

The AFT is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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As secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is determined to reverse access to life-saving healthcare.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has a long history of **promoting misinformation** about the effectiveness and safety of immunization. He continues to foster confusion about vaccine safety for immunizations that have been tested extensively and used for years. Although he promised not to take vaccines away from Americans who want them, his actions have erected barriers for people who need or want the shot to protect against COVID-19.

Kennedy fired the entire Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the independent committee of experts for the Centers for Disease

HEALTH MISINFORMATION

is information that is false, inaccurate or misleading, according to the best available evidence at the time. Health misinformation can be spread in many ways, including:

- Memes that started out as a joke—but people re-share, thinking the memes are true;
- Websites that look professional but include false or misleading stories;
- Quotations where the beginning or end have been deleted to change the meaning;
- Cherry-picked, or carefully selected, statistics that do not provide all the context for data;
- Misleading graphs or diagrams that look official but don't tell the whole story; and
- Old images that seem very recent, or even videos that have been edited to change meaning.

We are all susceptible to being influenced by misinformation, and it can be tempting to share because we like to feel we have information that others don't know. We may be seeking explanations or wanting to share information that helps us make sense of events. We want to protect the people we care about. And we want to feel connected to others.

You can help your family, friends and community with health misinformation: Listen. Empathize. Point to credible sources. Avoid shaming, and use inclusive language. Learn more with the [Office of the U.S. Surgeon General's Health Misinformation Community Toolkit](#).

Control and Prevention, replacing them with vaccine opponents who are likely to change vaccine recommendations.

The ACIP's guidance is influential. Under the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies cover vaccines recommended by ACIP. Many states adopted ACIP's guidance into law for pharmacists and childhood vaccine requirements. Pharmacists are only authorized to administer ACIP-recommended vaccines in at least 15 states and the District of Columbia (more information on Page 3).

Under Kennedy's leadership, the Food and Drug Administration has limited approval for COVID-19 vaccines to:

- Adults 65 and older; and
- Children and adults under age 65 who have at least one health condition that puts them at risk for severe illness from COVID-19. See [People with Certain Medical Conditions and COVID-19 Risk Factors | COVID-19 | CDC](#), which includes pregnancy, cancer, heart conditions, blood diseases, many physical disabilities, physical inactivity, dementia, substance use disorder and mental illnesses.

Kennedy has said that *children who do not have a health condition can be immunized against COVID-19 if a medical provider is consulted*. He has also asserted that anyone who wants the vaccine can get it.

But FDA authorizations do not include that information. People do not know if they must provide proof of a health condition and what kind of proof they need. The FDA did not address access to vaccines for healthcare workers and others who are at risk of infection at work, as well as people concerned about exposing a household member who is immunocompromised.

Many adults and children age 5 and older get COVID-19 vaccines and flu shots in retail pharmacies. National chains like CVS and Walgreens are offering COVID-19 vaccines with a physician's prescription in the states that only allow pharmacists to follow ACIP guidance by requiring a physician's prescription (more information on Page 3).

Healthcare Providers and States Show Leadership

Professional associations representing physicians, public health experts and others have stepped up to protect Americans from preventable infectious disease.

The American Academy of Pediatrics withdrew its endorsement of the ACIP's childhood vaccine schedule after the new committee changed recommendations. The AAP issued its own recommendations, which can be found here [AAP-Immunization-Schedule.pdf](#). The AAP's guidance is in line with the previous ACIP recommendations.

The American Association of Family Physicians provide their vaccine recommendations for children and adults here: [Immunization Schedules | AAFP](#)

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists also issued recommendations for **COVID-19, influenza and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)** vaccinations to protect pregnant people and their babies from severe complications. The ACOG based the guidance on the full body of current scientific evidence. [ACOG Releases Updated Maternal Immunization Guidance for COVID-19, Influenza, and RSV | ACOG](#)

Some States Are Moving to Protect Residents

Several states have moved quickly to change regulations:

- Authorizing the AAP childhood vaccine recommendations as an alternative to the ACIP guidance;
- Issuing standing orders for pharmacists to administer COVID-19 vaccines; and
- Encouraging or requiring health insurance companies to cover COVID-19 vaccines and others recommended by AAP and ACOG.

California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington have created a regional [partnership](#) to ensure vaccine access in their states.

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, New York City, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island also announced their [collaboration](#).

In contrast, Florida is planning to revoke all childhood vaccine requirements, although the state Legislature may vote against some measures.

Residents of some states may find they do not need a prescription, but still have trouble getting the vaccine at a retail pharmacy due to supply issues.

The Insurance Industry Agrees to Cover Vaccines for Now

AHIP, the industry group representing the health insurance industry, issued a statement that "Health plans will continue to cover all ACIP-recommended immunizations that were recommended as of September 1, 2025, including updated formulations of the COVID-19 and influenza vaccines, with no cost-sharing for patients through the end of 2026." This means that COVID-vaccines and other routine vaccines should be covered by insurance for now.

COVID-19 Vaccine Access as of Sept. 22, 2025

STATE-BY-STATE LIST

This information was up to date as of Sept. 22, but please note this is a fluid situation, and things are changing quickly on a state-by-state basis.

- **States where you can get the vaccine without a prescription at a major retail pharmacy:**

AL, AK, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, HI, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, MA, ME, MD, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, VA, VT, WA, WI and WY.

- **Jurisdictions that issued executive orders so that you can get a COVID-19 vaccine without a prescription:**

AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, HI, IL, MA, ME, MI, MN, NC, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OR, PA, RI, VA, WA

- **States that still have COVID-19 vaccine prescription requirements:**

FL, GA, KS, LA, WV

Moderna Spikevax is approved for children beginning at 6 months. A new Moderna vaccine, mNEXSPIKE is only approved for ages 12 and older.

Pfizer is approved for ages 5 and older.

Novamax is approved for ages 12 and older.