How do we know the vaccine is safe?

Although the process to develop a COVID-19 vaccine was faster than normal, that was possible because so many people have COVID infection and because a vaccine for a similar illness was already in the works. After the vaccine was tested in large clinical trials with diverse races and ethnicities, the data was reviewed by an independent committee of experts before the FDA issued an Emergency Use Authorization. Safety will continue to be monitored closely as more people get the vaccine.

How does safety testing for vaccines work?

In vaccine trials, first the vaccine is given to a small number of healthy volunteers. If they do well, the vaccine is given to a larger number of volunteers to establish whether it has promise to prevent disease. Finally, a promising vaccine is given to thousands of volunteers, who are followed closely to see if they develop any side effects and to compare their rates of infection with those of a group that did not receive vaccine. Almost all side effects that have been associated with vaccines occur within six weeks following the shot. That is why the COVID-19 vaccine trials required eight weeks of observation for vaccine recipients before deciding that the vaccines are safe.

What are the potential side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

Potential side effects include a sore arm, general muscle aches, headache, fatigue, chills, and fever. These effects are signals that your immune system is working. Very rarely, people can have a serious allergic reaction to the vaccine. This reaction is treatable, but that is the reason that we ask people to wait 15-30 minutes at the vaccination site after being vaccinated.

Can I get COVID-19 from getting vaccinated?

The COVID-19 vaccine will not give you COVID-19 infection. There is no living COVID-19 virus in the vaccines now available. The vaccine will not give you a positive result on a nasal swab test for COVID-19. Getting the vaccine, however, will greatly reduce your chances of getting COVID-19 in the future.

Does the COVID-19 vaccine work?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccines in use in the US are extremely effective at preventing COVID-19 illness and its complications. The Pfizer vaccine prevented 95% and the Moderna vaccine prevented 94% of COVID-19 cases in very large clinical trials. These are efficacy rates as high as those of the best vaccines we have for other types of infections.

Do I need the vaccine if I had COVID-19?

Yes. We do not know how long someone is protected after getting COVID-19, and so recommend getting the vaccine. However, getting infected again within 90 days is uncommon, so if you had a recent COVID-19 infection you can delay vaccination until the end of this period or get the vaccine as soon as you have been cleared from isolation.

How much does the COVID-19 vaccine cost?

The vaccine is free to all US residents, regardless of whether you have insurance. If you do have insurance, your healthcare provider may bill the insurer for an administration fee, but you do not need to pay anything out of pocket.

For more questions and answers about the COVID-19 vaccine, please click this link.