

Memorandum



To: All Staff and Residents
From: James C. D'Amico, DO, FACOI, CMD
Date: September 23, 2022
Re: COVID-19 Bivalent Vaccines FAQ

What is it?

The new COVID-19 bivalent vaccine is a combination of ½ of the original vaccine and ½ of a new vaccine that is specific for the Omicron BA5/BA4 subvariants which we believe have been responsible for 99% of recent COVID infections.

Why do we need it?

The COVID-19 virus continues to change and mutate. The good news is that scientists are learning more about the virus and developing better tools for both prevention and treatment. Right now, according to the CDC, the new COVID-19 bivalent vaccine is our best protection to prevent COVID-19 reinfections, hospitalizations, and death as well as long COVID. It appears to be better at protecting against different variants (broader protection), lasts longer and provide improved protection by engaging more of our immune fighter cells.

Who should get it?

Anyone 12 years old and older who has received the initial COVID-19 vaccine series, either Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson, AND is 2 months past their last vaccine shot is eligible and should consider getting the shot (Pfizer for 12 years old and older, Moderna for 18 years old and older).

Note: The previous booster shots are no longer available. The new COVID-19 bivalent vaccine is now the only shot that will be given.

What if you have recently had a COVID-19 infection?

You are eligible to get the new COVID-19 vaccine after you are feeling better and have completed your time in isolation.

Can you mix and match vaccines?

Yes. It does not matter if you have had Moderna or Pfizer previously, you can get either the Moderna or Pfizer bivalent COVID-19 vaccine.

Is it safe?

Yes. This new bivalent booster is the same type of COVID-19 vaccine, just an updated version.

What about side effects?

Early reports are that the new bivalent vaccine has fewer side effects than the original vaccination and monovalent booster shots. The most common side effects are headaches, fatigue, and muscle ache.

Will this ever end?

We are trying to get to the “endemic” stage. Models now suggest that this winter will be better than previous COVID winters in terms of infection rates, if we get enough of the population to get these new bivalent vaccines.

However, we are still seeing 100,000 people die each year from COVID infections versus 30,000 deaths from flu. We need to decrease transmission and the best and easiest way to do that is with vaccination.

September 23, 2022

Will we continue to need more shots in the future?

We don't know yet. This could be an annual shot similar to the flu vaccine.

What should we expect for the future?

As we have seen in New Jersey and here at Medford Leas, recommendations for better protection from COVID-19 will change, just as the virus continues to change and we get more data. We should assume we are not done adjusting our fight against COVID-19. Doing our part and getting vaccinated, as recommended, allows us to reclaim our lives, our economy and helps prevent stressing our healthcare system beyond its capacity.

When we increase our protection by getting the recommended shots, it not only protects us personally, but it helps restore the familiar way of life to our community.

Is this new vaccine mandated?

At the current time, the New Jersey Department of Health is not mandating the bivalent COVID vaccine. However, staff are now considered eligible for the new vaccine (assuming it has been over 2 months since your last booster). Those who do not get the new vaccine will not considered "up to date," and as such, will need to be tested once or twice per week (currently twice per week based on community transmission levels).

We are fortunate to work in a community in which 100% of the staff did receive one booster. Because of this, our residents have been some of the more protected residents in the entire state. I expect all staff to choose to protect themselves, their families, and our residents.

What about the flu this year? Is the flu shot still important?^[JV1]

It may be a very active flu season this year, as we are seeing a significant uptick in flu cases in the southern hemisphere (Australia). It will be very important to get your flu shot. Staff flu clinics have been scheduled for October.

Thank you. As always, feel the free to contact me or a member of the COVID-19 Task Force with any questions.