



COVID-19 Booster shots and child vaccine Q&A

The Rock Island County Health Department's top priority remains staying ahead of the virus and protecting our residents from COVID-19 with safe, effective, and long-lasting vaccines. This virus is constantly changing, and we are following the science. Vaccines remain the most powerful tool we have against COVID-19. If you haven't been vaccinated yet, you should get vaccinated right away. Almost all the cases of severe disease, hospitalization, and death continue to occur among those not yet vaccinated. We offer two walk-in vaccination clinics each week: Tuesday for Moderna and Johnson & Johnson (18 and older) and Friday for Pfizer (12 and older). Hours are 9 a.m. to noon and 1-4 p.m. both days. Our healthcare and pharmacy partners also are offering vaccines seven days a week with appointments into the evening. Visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find your shot.

What's the difference between a third dose and a booster shot?

People who have compromised immune systems need a third dose to build as much immunity as possible. The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines normally are a two-dose series, but people with compromised immune systems don't build as much protection with just two doses. Scientists have determined that having a third dose in the series allows immunocompromised patients to build more antibodies and, thus, giving them more protection against becoming seriously ill from the virus that causes COVID-19.

A booster shot is different from a third dose. A booster shot helps upgrade waning immunity. We use booster shots with other vaccines. For example, every 10 years, adults need a booster shot for Tdap, which is the vaccine that prevents tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. Immunity wanes for this vaccine, which is why a booster shot is common practice and important to public and personal health.

Who can get a third dose now?

The Rock Island County Health Department offers third vaccine doses to severely immunocompromised people, as recommended by both the CDC and the Illinois Department of Public Health. The Moderna vaccine is given each Tuesday, and Pfizer is offered on Fridays at the health department, 2112 25th Ave., Rock Island. Hours are 9-noon and 1-4 p.m. both days. Our healthcare and pharmacy partners also are offering third doses to immunocompromised patients. Visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find your shot.

At this time, only people who meet the following criteria will be offered the third dose:

- Been receiving active cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood
- Received an organ transplant and are taking medicine to suppress the immune system
- Received a stem cell transplant within the last two years or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system

- Moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome)
- Advanced or untreated HIV infection
- Active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids or other drugs that may suppress your immune response

Patients should talk to their healthcare provider about their medical condition and whether getting an additional dose is appropriate for them.

When can I get a booster shot?

The Food and Drug Administration's advisory committee announced last week that the Pfizer COVID-19 booster shot is safe, effective and recommended for individuals who have been fully vaccinated for at least six months and are:

- 65 years and older
- At high risk of severe COVID-19
- At high risk because of their jobs

The FDA doesn't have to follow its advisor's recommendation, but it usually does.

As a next step, the Pfizer booster shot must be reviewed and recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, or ACIP, to further define these groups before it will be made available for use. That meeting will take place Wednesday and Thursday, Sept. 22-23.

The FDA advisers did not recommend boosters for the general population at this time. All of this debate comes as the White House announced in mid-August that booster shots could be available Sept. 20. Some health officials believe that announcement was premature and potentially not based on currently available scientific data.

What about Moderna and Johnson & Johnson boosters?

Data for Moderna and Johnson & Johnson patients are expected soon. Both of those manufacturers applied for Emergency Use Authorization later than Pfizer, Moderna about three weeks later and Johnson & Johnson 70 days later. ACIP also will examine that data. Janssen, the maker of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, announced this week that a second dose of its vaccine boosted antibodies. However, that data is from the company itself and has not been reviewed by FDA and CDC experts. It is likely that people who received a J&J COVID-19 vaccine will need a booster dose. With those data in hand, CDC will keep the public informed with a timely plan for J&J booster shots.

Why is there a debate regarding COVID-19 vaccine boosters?

The COVID-19 vaccines authorized in the United States continue to be highly effective in reducing risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death, even against the widely circulating Delta variant. However, COVID-19 constantly evolves. Experts are looking at all available data to understand how well the vaccines are working, including how new variants, such as Delta, affect vaccine effectiveness.

Medical ethicists also worry that industrialized countries that had earlier access to vaccines shouldn't be giving booster shots while much of the less-industrialized world is waiting for first doses. The more the

virus duplicates, the more chance it can mutate into a variant that is not well covered by existing vaccines. Getting the world vaccinated will reduce the amount of virus circulating, and, thus, reduce the likelihood that the virus will mutate beyond current vaccine coverage.

If we need a booster dose, does that mean that the vaccines aren't working?

No. COVID-19 vaccines are working very well to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death, even against the widely circulating Delta variant. However, with the Delta variant, public health experts are starting to see reduced protection against mild and moderate disease.

When will children younger than 13 be able to be vaccinated?

Pfizer has announced that its clinic trials show the COVID-19 vaccine at a lower dosage is highly effective for children ages 5 to 11 in preventing infection. However, this data has yet to be reviewed by outside health experts and must undergo the same intense authorization process as the adult vaccines.

Acting FDA Commissioner Dr. Janet Woodcock and Dr. Peter Marks, director of FDA's Center for Biologics Research and Evaluation, said in a statement earlier in September that the agency would review data for a vaccine for younger children "as quickly as possible, likely in a matter of weeks rather than months." If authorized, vaccines for children ages 5-11 could begin later this fall.