

COVID BOOSTERS

HOW ARE THE NEW BOOSTERS DIFFERENT?

They're combination or "bivalent" shots that contain half the original vaccine that's been used since December 2020 and half protection against today's dominant omicron versions, BA.4 and BA.5. It's the first update to COVID-19 vaccines ever cleared by the Food and Drug Administration.

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?

Updated new booster shots made by Pfizer and its partner BioNTech are authorized for anyone 12 and older, and Moderna's version is only for adults. They're to be used as a booster for anyone who's already had their primary vaccination series from any one of the original vaccinations (J & J, Moderna, Pfizer) and regardless of how many boosters they've already gotten.

WHAT IF I JUST GOT A BOOSTER? HOW LONG SHOULD I WAIT TO GET THIS UPDATED ONE?

I would advise waiting at least three months for this new Booster. If you wait a little longer, say 6 months, you get a better immunologic response.

WHAT IF I RECENTLY RECOVERED FROM COVID-19?

It's still important to get vaccinated even if you've already been infected -- but timing matters here, too.

The CDC has long told people to defer vaccination until they've recovered but also that people may consider waiting for three months after recovering to get a vaccination. And several CDC advisers say waiting the three months is important, both for potentially more benefit from the shot and to reduce chances of a rare side effect, heart inflammation, that sometimes affects teen boys and young men.

CAN I GET A NEW COVID-19 BOOSTER AND A FLU SHOT AT THE SAME TIME?

Yes, one in each arm.

WHAT IF I WANT TO WAIT?

People at high risk from COVID-19 are encouraged to get the new booster when they're due. After all, BA.5 still is spreading widely and hospitalization rates in older adults have increased since spring.

Most Americans eligible for an updated booster have gone at least six months since their last shot, according to the CDC — plenty of time that another shot should trigger a good immune response.