



# HEALTH ALERT

Gregory Cherpes, MD  
ODP Medical Director



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## Updated Information on COVID-19 Vaccines

The Office of Developmental Programs is issuing this Health Alert to bring awareness of recent information regarding COVID-19 vaccines. Throughout the pandemic, it has been evident that individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism are at increased risk for infection and more severe outcomes from COVID-19. Vaccination for the virus that causes COVID-19 is a vital tool in protecting lives and bringing an end to a pandemic that so far has taken over 633,000 American lives.

Pennsylvania, like the rest of the country, has been experiencing high rates of community spread of COVID-19. The increased rates of infection are associated with increased numbers of people hospitalized and increased numbers of deaths. People who are not fully vaccinated are at the highest risk for infection, hospitalization, and death.

### **The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves the Pfizer vaccine**

On August 23, the FDA granted full approval for Pfizer's mRNA vaccine for COVID-19 for people 16 years old and over. You may hear the vaccine being referred to now by its brand name, Comirnaty (pronounced: koe-mir'-na-tee). The vaccine continues to be available under Emergency Use Authorization for people aged 12 years to 15 years. With this approval, the public can be confident that this vaccine meets the high standards for safety, effectiveness, and manufacturing quality the FDA requires of an approved product. More information is available at: [FDA Approves First COVID-19 Vaccine | FDA](#)

### **Third Dose of mRNA COVID-19 Vaccine Recommended for People with Immunocompromise**

Currently, the CDC is recommending that moderately to severely immunocompromised people receive an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine. This includes people who have:

- 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 2 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

The CDC has stressed that people should talk to their healthcare provider about their medical condition, and whether getting an additional dose is appropriate for them.

For those individuals who meet criteria for a third dose of vaccine, the CDC recommends waiting at least 28 days after completion of your initial 2-dose vaccination before seeking the additional dose.

There is not yet a recommendation from the CDC for individuals with immunocompromise who have been vaccinated with the single-dose Johnson & Johnson's Janssen (J&J/Janssen) COVID-19 vaccine. More information is expected soon.

More information about the third dose of vaccine for people who are immunocompromised is available at: [Additional Dose FAQs \(pa.gov\)](#)

## **Booster Dose of Vaccine**

An additional dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to help promote continuity immunity from infection, called a “booster dose,” has not yet been recommended by the CDC or FDA. Many news sources have reported that this recommendation will be coming soon. Some news sources have reported the date of September 20, 2021 as the date that booster doses will be available. ODP will continue to share information as it becomes known. When booster shots are available, you can reach out to the provider who gave your initial vaccine doses as a possible source for the booster shot.

Given the anticipated need in the near future for a high volume of vaccinations, Intermediate Care Facility and residential providers who do not have an identified vaccination provider and/or a plan for vaccinating their residents should secure a relationship with a vaccine provider(s) or establish a plan. Providers that need assistance should contact Doug Trahey at [RA-PWODPEMRGNCYRSPRQ@pa.gov](mailto:RA-PWODPEMRGNCYRSPRQ@pa.gov).

More information on finding vaccine providers in PA is available at: [PA Unites Against COVID | PA.GOV](#).

### **Where to Learn More:**

- [FDA Approves First COVID-19 Vaccine | FDA](#)
- [Additional Dose FAQs \(pa.gov\)](#)
- [PA Unites Against COVID | PA.GOV](#)