



# Press Release

## **COVID-19 BOOSTERS AVAILABLE FOR FULLY VACCINATED GROUPS TO MAINTAIN PROTECTION**

Individuals who have received the primary two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna and the one dose Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccinations may be eligible for a booster vaccine to support the body's immune response to COVID-19. Appointments are available at Macon County Public Health to all who meet the criteria for a booster dose.

Those who received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna may be eligible for a booster vaccine as approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the following groups of people who received their second Pfizer vaccine at least six months ago. These recommendations apply to those who received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccination for their first two vaccines, and they may get either booster with **ANY** of the available vaccines:

- Patients 65 years of age or older,
- Patients 18 years of age or older who are a resident of a long term care facility,
- Patients aged 18 to 64 who have an underlying health condition<sup>1</sup> that puts them at higher risk for severe COVID-19,
- Patients aged 18 to 64 who have an occupational or institutional exposure to COVID-19<sup>2</sup>.

Those 18 and older who received the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) vaccine are approved to get a booster vaccine by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They must have received their J&J vaccine at least two months ago. Those who received the J&J one shot vaccine are able to choose any of the available vaccines for their booster.

The Pfizer-BioNTech booster vaccine is also approved by the CDC for the following groups of people who received their second Pfizer vaccine at least 28 days prior<sup>3</sup>. These recommendations, currently, only apply to those who received the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccination for their first two vaccines:

- Patients 12 years of age and older who are moderately or severely immunocompromised.

<sup>1</sup> Health Conditions That May Put A Person At Higher Risk Of Severe COVID-19: Cancer, Chronic kidney disease, Chronic lung diseases (like COPD, asthma, interstitial lung disease, cystic fibrosis, and pulmonary hypertension), Dementia, Other Neurological conditions, Diabetes, Down syndrome, Heart conditions, HIV infection, Weakened immune system, Liver disease, Obesity, Pregnancy, Sickle cell disease, Smoking (current or former), Organ or blood transplant, Stroke or cerebrovascular disease, and Substance use disorders

<sup>2</sup> Those At Risk For Occupational and Institutional Exposures: Healthcare workers, Teachers/Educational staff, Correctional staff and inmates, First responders, Food and agricultural workers, Grocery store staff, Group home residents.

<sup>3</sup> Patients between the ages of 12-15 years of age must have parental/guardian consent to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and COVID-19 booster vaccine.

Those who meet the above criteria are encouraged to schedule their vaccine booster appointment, by calling Macon County Public Health at 828-349-2081. The booster vaccine is available at no cost to those who are eligible, regardless of their insurance status. If you are insured, you are asked to bring your insurance card to your appointment. You do not have to receive your booster at the same location that you received your primary COVID-19 vaccinations. **However, you MUST bring your vaccination card that you received with your initial vaccine.**

Each COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and J&J) is working to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death, in people who are fully vaccinated, if they become infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. However, with increased variant transmission, researchers are seeing a decrease in protections in those who are fully vaccinated and at additional risk, either due to their immune system or individual risk factors (like their occupation or living situation).

These booster vaccinations will give these individuals the protection that they may have lost over time. There is not currently data to support vaccine boosters in the general population, because the general population has not seen the same decrease in protection, though it is possible that a vaccine booster will be recommended to the general public in the future.

Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19; however, anyone of any age can become infected with this illness. Therefore, we ask that community members **strictly follow** the governor's recommendations and continue to practice **social distancing**, as well as safe hygiene measures such as hand washing and frequently cleaning touched objects and surfaces. Everyone who is eligible is encouraged to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, a safe and effective prevention tool.

If you believe that you may have COVID-19, please call the Health Department at 828-349-2081 to schedule an appointment for a test. To register and schedule an appointment to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, please call 828-349-2081.

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