

# COVID-19 vs Flu

COVID-19 and Influenza, also known as the flu, both cause lung infections. Both also cause breathing problems and are contagious. The symptoms of COVID-19 and the flu can look similar but are caused by different viruses. Because COVID-19 and the flu have many of the same symptoms, testing may be needed to confirm a diagnosis. COVID-19 and the flu are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a new coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2), and flu is caused by infection with influenza viruses.<sup>1</sup>

COVID-19 seems to spread more easily than flu and causes more serious illnesses in some people.

|                                 | COVID-19   | Flu  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>When do symptoms appear?</b> | 2 to 14 days after infection   | 1 to 4 days after infection  |
| <b>When are you contagious?</b> | You can spread the COVID-19 virus about 2 days before showing symptoms. You can give COVID-19 to others for at least 10 days.  | You can spread flu to others for about 1 day before showing any symptoms. You can give the flu to others for 7 days. |
| <b>How is it spread?</b>        | COVID-19 and the flu can both spread by close contact, from person to person who are within 6 feet from each other. COVID-19 and the flu are spread mainly by droplets. This happens when a person with the infection coughs, sneezes, or talks. Other possible ways it can spread include touching a surface that has a virus on it, and then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose. |  |

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Where to Go When You Have A Question About Your Health ..... 3

Pregnancy and COVID-19..... 4

COVID-19 Vaccine Information FAQ's..... 6

## Signs and symptoms

While you can have no symptoms (called asymptomatic), other people can have serious symptoms that require hospitalization.

Some symptoms of COVID-19 that are similar to the flu include:

- ◀ fevers
- ◀ sore throat
- ◀ chills
- ◀ runny nose
- ◀ cough
- ◀ body aches
- ◀ difficulty breathing
- ◀ headache
- ◀ shortness of breath
- ◀ vomiting
- ◀ diarrhea
- ◀ fatigue

Older adults with underlying medical conditions, like heart or lung disease, have a higher risk of a more serious COVID-19 infection. COVID-19 also spreads easier than the flu. Symptoms specific to COVID-19 (and not the flu) include loss of taste or smell.

## Treatment

If you have COVID-19 and/or the flu, supportive care will help. Treat the symptoms you have and call your health care team. If you are hospitalized and you are at high risk for complications of the flu you can be treated with antiviral flu medications.

If you are hospitalized with COVID-19, you can also be treated with an antiviral medication. There are other treatment options for hospitalized patients with COVID-19, which are regularly updated as new evidence develops.



## Prevention

You can help by taking steps to slow the spread of COVID-19 and the flu. Wear your mask, social distance, wash your hands often, avoid touching your face while in public, and quarantine if you have been exposed to others who have COVID-19.

---

Submitted by:  
Augusto Alonto, MD  
Medical Director, Infection Prevention and Control  
Jesse Brown VAMC

### References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Similarities and Differences between Flu and COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>



## Where to Go When You Have a Question About Your Health

Social media can make it difficult to find reliable, truthful, and current information. It has also allowed misleading and false information to spread fast and far. Below are things to consider as you search for accurate information you can trust.

### Who published the website?

Generally, reliable websites make it easy for you to see who manages and/or published the site and the information on it.

### What is the intent of the website?

The intent of the website is related to who pays for it. It costs money to run a website.

#### Website addresses ending in:

- .gov** Federal Government-sponsored
- .edu** Educational Institution-sponsored
- .org** Generally used by non-profit organizations
- .com** Open to everyone

The person, or group of people, that support the website can change the content presented to promote what the owner(s) want to achieve on the site. Many websites have a link "About This Site" that provides the general purpose or goals of the site.

### Where did the information come from?

Many health information websites share information from other sources. If the organization or person in charge of the website is not the original author, the original source should be easy to find.

### How current is the information?

Reliable Websites have a policy on how often the content is reviewed and updated. It is important to know the health information is current and correct. The most recent updates are usually noted at the bottom of the site.

### When in doubt – ask your VA Health Care Team!

Your health care team is always available to answer questions and help you. Involving your health care team is important before making any major health-related changes.

Some of your best sources for health information is your health care team, the Veterans Health Library ([www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov](http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov)), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)).

Submitted by:  
Amanda Luepke, CTRS  
Veteran Health Education Coordinator  
Tomah VAMC



# Women's View

## Pregnancy and COVID-19

Having a baby is generally one of the happiest times in a woman's life. This year there is increased fear and worry during the COVID-19 pandemic. There may be many questions running through your head.

**What will happen if you get COVID-19 while you are pregnant?**

**Can you give it to your baby?**

**How will the pandemic affect delivery?**

**Is the baby at risk being in the hospital where there are people with COVID-19?**

**Having a new baby is challenging enough without having the pandemic to make it more uncertain.**

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) pregnant women may be more likely to have severe illness with a positive COVID-19 diagnosis.<sup>1</sup> It is recommended that we continue to follow the guidelines in place to reduce transmission. This includes washing your hands, social distancing, and wearing a face covering. This is especially important when you are pregnant or high risk. Since the beginning of November 2020, there are currently 34,968 cases of COVID-19 in pregnant women with 50 deaths according to the CDC.<sup>2</sup>

It is not clear on how and when a mother may transmit COVID-19 to their infant.<sup>3</sup> Having a positive COVID-19 test does not mean you will be separated from your infant. You will need to take extra care by wearing a mask and washing your hands before holding or touching your baby. You

may still breastfeed. Breast milk helps protect babies from infections, including infections of the ears, lungs, and digestive system. Most research shows that it is safe to feed breast milk to your baby when you have COVID-19.<sup>4</sup>

COVID-19 has placed limitations on hospitals and other health care facilities. Ask who can be there for you during delivery and after your baby is born. Many places will allow a support person. You and your support person may have to get tested for COVID prior to, or after, being admitted. It is likely that your stay will be shorter than normal for your, and your infants, protection. There also may be rules about coming and going from the hospital to decrease outside contact.

Your provider may change your pre-natal visit from coming into the office to a virtual visit through your



computer, tablet, or smartphone (telehealth) to avoid risk. It is important to still attend your routine visits and seek medical care when needed.<sup>5</sup> Many providers are using telehealth and video visits to continue care without the risk of you being exposed to COVID-19.

Post-partum depression is a real issue for new mothers especially during this pandemic. There are many resources available to help you cope during this trying time. Always speak to your health care team about how

you are feeling.

Until most people get vaccinated, the best thing you can do is limit your and your infant's chances of being exposed. Take necessary safety measures but go about your life and enjoy your new baby.

---

Submitted by:  
Angela Howard, MSN, RN  
Women's Health Program Manager  
VA Illiana Health Care System

References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). COVID-19, Pregnancy, Breastfeeding and Caring for Newborns. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). CDC COVID-19 Data Tracker. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/special-populations/pregnancy-data-on-covid-19.html>
3. World Health Organization. (2020). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Pregnancy and childbirth. <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-pregnancy-and-childbirth>
4. Mayo Clinic. (2020). COVID-19: Pregnancy and COVID-19: What are the risks? <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/pregnancy-and-covid-19/art-20482639>
5. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (2020). Coronavirus (COVID-19), Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: A Message for Patients. <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding>



# Ask an Expert

## COVID-19 Vaccine Information Frequently Asked Questions for Veterans

### **Is COVID-19 vaccine safe?**

Like all vaccines, COVID-19 vaccines have been rigorously tested for safety before being authorized for use in the United States.

### **How many shots of COVID-19 vaccine will I need?**

The two authorized and recommended vaccines to prevent COVID-19 in the United States (Moderna and Pfizer) both need two shots to be effective.

### **Will a COVID-19 vaccination protect me from getting sick with COVID-19?**

Yes. COVID-19 vaccination works by teaching your immune system how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19, and this protects you from getting sick with COVID-19.

### **Can a COVID-19 vaccine make me sick with COVID-19?**

No. None of the authorized and recommended COVID-19 vaccines or COVID-19 vaccines currently in development in the United States contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. This means that a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19.

### **If I get the COVID-19 vaccine, can I stop wearing a mask in VA facilities?**

No. Even if you receive a COVID-19 vaccine, you'll still need to wear a mask that covers your mouth and nose when you're in a VA facility. You'll also need to follow other VA safety rules like practicing physical distancing. This helps protect you, other Veterans, and our staff.

All information provided in this section can be found through the CDC's COVID-19 webpage:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/index.html>

## **After getting a COVID-19 vaccine, will I test positive for COVID-19 on a viral test?**

No. Neither the recently authorized and recommended vaccines nor the other COVID-19 vaccines currently in clinical trials in the United States can cause you to test positive on viral tests, which are used to see if you have a current infection.

## **If I have already had COVID-19 and recovered, should I still get a COVID-19 vaccine?**

Yes. Due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19 and the fact that re-infection with COVID-19 is possible, vaccine should be offered to you regardless of whether you already had COVID-19 infection.

## **Will a COVID-19 vaccine alter my DNA?**

No. COVID-19 vaccines do not change or interact with your DNA in any way.

## **What should I do now to protect myself and others if I haven't been vaccinated yet?**

You should cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others, avoid close contact with people who are sick, stay 6 feet away from others, avoid crowds, and wash your hands often.

## **What are the most common side effects?**

Most side effects are mild to moderate. The most common side effects for both vaccines include:



In the arm where you got the shot:

- ◀ Pain
- ◀ Swelling
- ◀ Redness

Throughout the rest of your body:

- ◀ Chills
- ◀ Tiredness
- ◀ Headache

## **Who should not get vaccinated?**

If you have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) or an immediate allergic reaction—even if it was not severe—to any ingredient in a COVID-19 vaccine, you should not get it. Your doctor will help you decide if it is safe for you to get vaccinated.

\*Please note that neither vaccine available contains eggs, preservatives, or latex.

---

Submitted by:  
Justine Lownsbury, BSEd, MHA, MPhil  
Program Manager, Learning Resources  
Zablocki VA Medical Center



# Great Lakes VA Healthviews



**VA** | U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

## Newsletter Team

### Senior Editor

Justine Lownsbury  
Milwaukee VAMC

Darcie Clauson  
VA Illiana HCS

Erin Kleikamp  
Iron Mountain VAMC

Christina Moreno  
Jesse Brown VAMC

Denise Contreras  
Madison VAMC

Kimberly Stevens  
Lovell FHCC

Amanda Luepke  
Tomah VAMC

Dana Strohmaier  
Hines VAH

Kim Chapman  
Layout and Design  
Milwaukee VAMC

Your best source for information about your health will always be your health care team. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to ask questions about your health concerns.

## Phone Numbers for VISN 12 Hospitals

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| Hines:         | 708-202-8387 |
| Iron Mountain: | 906-774-3300 |
| Jesse Brown:   | 312-569-8387 |
| Lovell:        | 800-393-0865 |
| Madison:       | 608-256-1901 |
| Milwaukee:     | 888-469-6614 |
| Tomah:         | 800-872-8662 |
| VA Illiana     | 217-554-3000 |

## “Ask An Expert” Question or Idea for Future Articles

Do you have an “Ask An Expert” question or a suggestion for future topics for articles? Your ideas can be e-mailed or mailed to the Senior Editor.

E-mail: [SrEditorGreatLakesVAHealthviews@va.gov](mailto:SrEditorGreatLakesVAHealthviews@va.gov)

Mailing address:

Justine Lownsbury

Milwaukee VA Medical Center Library  
5000 W. National Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53295

VISN 12 VA Healthcare facilities are accredited by The Joint Commission. Joint Commission evaluates healthcare facilities on quality, safety of patient care and safety of the environment.

If you have any concerns about patient care or safety in your facility, first contact the person in charge. If your concern cannot be resolved, the VA encourages you to contact Joint Commission. You may request a “public information interview.”

Requests can be made to:

Division of Accreditation Operations, Office of Quality Monitoring  
The Joint Commission  
One Renaissance Boulevard, Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181  
1-800-994-6610

Copies of Great Lakes VA Healthviews are available in the waiting rooms of the VISN 12 Medical Centers and community outpatient clinics.

You can view online or subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter by going to the VISN 12 home page [www.visn12.va.gov](http://www.visn12.va.gov)

