



**PRACTICE ALERT**  
**COVID-19 Vaccines FAQ**  
**January 2021**

In December 2020, two COVID-19 vaccines were approved for emergency use in the United States. NASW strongly recommends that all adults receive a vaccine when they are eligible to access it, unless their medical providers advise against receiving the vaccine due to [certain underlying medical conditions](#) or a history of [severe allergic reactions](#). Based on substantial evidence from clinical trials, the FDA has determined that the vaccines are safe and effective. Tragically, over 400,000 people in the United States have died from the life-threatening complications of COVID-19. The health risks of having COVID-19 greatly outweigh the risks of vaccination, and being vaccinated helps to protect you, your clients, your family members, and your community.

NASW continues to monitor evolving developments in federal and state level vaccination plans and advocate for vaccine access for social workers as well as high-risk individuals and communities.

**Where can I find out about the COVID-19 vaccines?**

The [CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Page](#) and [FDA COVID-19 Vaccines Page](#) have information about the vaccines that are currently approved for use, including safety information, recipient education material, and training resources for health care providers.

**How can I learn more about vaccine safety?**

The CDC has many resources including [Answering Patients' Questions](#), [Understanding and Explaining mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines](#), and [Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination](#). The FDA has Frequently Asked Questions pages on the [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine](#) and the [Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine](#) with detailed information about clinical trial participation, side effects and adverse events, and ongoing safety monitoring. CMS is hosting a series of stakeholder engagement calls and chats regarding vaccine safety. The schedule of calls is available at <https://www.cms.gov/outreach-education/partner-resources/coronavirus-covid-19-partner-toolkit>.

**As a social worker, when can I access the vaccine?**

Social worker access to COVID-19 vaccines varies by state and practice setting. In December, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommended that states prioritize health care personnel and long-term care facility residents in the first phase of vaccine distribution. Many states have further specified that only health care workers with direct patient contact are eligible to access the vaccine in Phase 1a. Phase 1b includes individuals who are over 75 years old and non-health essential workers. The full recommendations of the Committee are available at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/covid-19.html>. In mid-January, several states expanded eligibility to individuals 65 and older following a change in federal guidance.

**I am providing services via telehealth only, not in-person. Am I eligible to get the vaccine?**

Supplies of COVID-19 vaccines are limited and states are prioritizing access for individuals that have direct patient contact. In many states, private practitioners using telehealth and social workers who are not providing in-person services are not eligible for the vaccine in Phase 1a.

**I am eligible for the vaccine, but since I am not in a high-risk group, should I delay receiving it so that others who are high-risk can receive it?**

NASW recommends that individuals get the vaccine as soon as they meet their state's eligibility criteria. As more individuals become eligible in the next phases of vaccine distribution, there are likely to be shortages and longer wait times. There have also been reports that some distribution sites have had to discard vaccine doses because there were not enough eligible recipients. There are specific storage requirements and expiration time frames once the vaccines are prepared for use.

**What does the vaccine cost?**

The federal government has covered the cost of COVID-19 vaccines so that consumers are not charged. However, providers may charge a small fee for administration of the vaccine. This fee may be reimbursed by an individual's insurance plan or the Provider Relief Fund. Uninsured patients can still access the vaccine at no cost.

**How can I learn more about accessing the vaccine for myself and my clients?**

Refer to resources from your NASW Chapter, State Department of Health, County Department of Health, and/or employer for specific guidance on vaccine distribution in your area. In some regions, retail pharmacies and physician practices are offering the vaccine by appointment. The Kaiser Family Foundation has compiled a list of state plans and the current status of distribution in each state in [The COVID-19 "Vaccination Line": An Update on State Prioritization Plans](#).

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