FAQ #2: December 21, 2020 -- Containing Additional Questions and Answers from the December 14<sup>th</sup> Vaccinate VNSNY! Conference Call

The following FAQs were adapted from questions submitted by VNSNY staff for the Vaccinate VNSNY! Conference Calls hosted by Andria Castellanos on Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Vaccine Basics & Safety**

Can the doctor please provide a reliable magazine or article to read information about adverse events and all investigations on the vaccine?
The most reliable sources for information about the COVID-19 vaccine are the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov) and the [FDA](https://www.fda.gov). There is, unfortunately, a lot of misinformation on the Internet about this and other vaccines. We encourage staff to choose credible sources, or ask questions of VNSNY staff or their physicians directly.

Can you clarify which vaccine will be available to field staff?
The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine will be available to field staff, and eventually all staff.

Are we able to receive a Pfizer vaccine or only the Moderna that has been mentioned via VNSNY communication? Will we have a choice at VNSNY?
VNSNY will be offering the Moderna vaccine to all staff. However, you are welcome to get a different vaccine if one becomes available to you through other channels.

I would just like to confirm if there is any truth to the rumor that there is a microchip in the vaccine.
No, there is no microchip in the vaccine.

Is this a one- or two-dose vaccine?
The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine requires two doses, 28 days apart.

Should I test for COVID antibodies before we get vaccinated?
That's not necessary, since those with antibodies should still be vaccinated.

Can the vaccine be given to those who have COVID-19?
Those who have recently had COVID-19 or a positive coronavirus test should delay vaccination for 90 days.

Can you explain why VNSNY will be receiving and using the Moderna vaccine versus the Pfizer vaccine, and what the differences between them are?
The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are very much alike, and their safety and efficacy data is similar. The main reason VNSNY is using the Moderna vaccine is because it's easier for us to store, transport, and distribute. The Pfizer vaccine has to be stored in a “deep freeze” of -94°F— a temperature requiring specialized freezers—until ready for use. It can then last in a normal
refrigerator for five days after it thaws. The frozen Moderna vaccine can be stored at -4°F, a temperature that regular industrial or household freezers can achieve. Once thawed, it can be kept in a normal refrigerator for up to 30 days.

**How effective is the vaccine following the first vaccination? Following the booster, at what point is maximum effectiveness in place?**
The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine is 80.2% effective after the first dose. Full efficacy—94.5%—is reached 14 days after the second dose.

**Will people who are vaccinated still be able to transmit the virus to others?**
Scientists are still unclear about this, but it’s possible. We know that the COVID-19 vaccination will allow your body to quickly fight off the virus, preventing you from getting ill. In theory, however, a person who is immune to COVID-19 could still contain and spread the coronavirus, despite not having any symptoms of illness.

It is my understanding that even with the vaccine, you can still be a carrier and possible spreader of the virus, just without contracting it yourself. Given that this is true, how is VNSNY planning to ensure the safety of patients, their families, and the families of staff who may not receive the vaccine?
Until transmission rates are low, we will be continuing with preventative practices, including the use of masks and other personal protective equipment.

**Once the person already got the vaccine, will this person still be using a mask and why? At what point will a mask no longer be required in the office?**
Yes, a mask will still be required. We don’t yet know if those who have been vaccinated can still spread the coronavirus to others. This may change once transmission, illness, and hospitalization rates dramatically decline, and vaccination rates increase. For now, we will continue all of our preventive practices, including the use of masks and other personal protective equipment.

**How long will this vaccine be effective?**
At this time, it’s not clear how long you will be immune to COVID-19 after getting the Moderna vaccine. Estimates from animal studies suggest the vaccine may provide protection for several years.

**Is it safe for people to take the vaccine? Do we know what effect it may have on those who take it?**
Yes, the vaccine is safe and highly effective at preventing illness from COVID-19. The vaccine has been in human trials since early March, tested on tens of thousands of people, and no serious adverse effects have been recorded. Mild, short-term side effects such as pain at the injection site appear to be common. More serious reactions are much less common and may include muscle aches, fever and headaches.

**Can the medical community anticipate or speculate on the possible long-term side effects from this vaccine?**
The FDA has declared that the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine has a “favorable safety profile” with no long-term safety concerns.

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**Vaccine Availability & Administration**
When will we be getting the vaccine?
The FDA authorized the Moderna vaccine for emergency use on December 18, 2020. We expect to receive our first shipment of the vaccine early in the week of December 20 and will begin administering it very soon after that. We will keep staff posted on the exact timing.

Who will receive the vaccine from VNSNY—will it be some nurses, all nurses, HHAs, field managers? What about part-time staff? What about subcontractor staff? What about teleworking staff?
We are prioritizing field staff, including nurses, physical and speech therapists, home health aides, and anyone who sees a patient in their home. Those staff members will be vaccinated first. All staff, regardless of their full-time or part-time employment status, will be eligible for a vaccine and are encouraged to get it. The prioritization based upon your role and your risk for serious COVID-19 illness will determine when we can offer it to you.

How do we decide which patients receive the vaccine first?
VNSNY is not currently focused on vaccinating patients. We are vaccinating our staff first as per CDC guidance.

Will the vaccine be offered only in New York City? What about Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester? Will it be offered in all offices?
Right now, we are receiving vaccines from the New York City Bureau of Immunization, and we have to give it in New York City. However, we can vaccinate staff that live in Nassau, Suffolk, or Westchester at one of our NYC offices. That may change as more information gets to us. We are planning on giving vaccines in all the New York City regional offices, but we may start at the location at 220 East 42nd Street in Manhattan.

How can we make an appointment for vaccination?
VNSNY will be calling all staff to schedule their vaccinations.

Can we go locally to the pharmacy instead? Which is the fastest option?
Right now, local pharmacies do not have vaccines and do not know when they’ll be receiving them. It may not be for months, as federal and state officials are prioritizing healthcare workers. However, if your pharmacy has it available before your scheduled vaccination, you are certainly welcome to get vaccinated at your local pharmacy.

Is there a NYC partner location or partner hospital that the highest-risk field nurses and other tier 1 clinicians can be vaccinated today or this week?
Not at this time.

Can you explain the process for handling the distribution of two vaccine doses to staff?
At the time a staff member receives their first dose of the vaccine, they will be scheduled for their second dose 28 days later.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory or compulsory for staff? Can I decline or opt out?
The vaccine is highly encouraged, but not mandatory for VNSNY staff. You have the option to decline vaccination.

Will there be ramifications for staff who opt out of vaccination?
No.

How can our family members get vaccinated?
At this time, unless your family member is on the priority list as an essential worker or a patient in a nursing home there is not yet the ability to get the vaccine. When the vaccine does become
available, your family members should speak with their doctors about getting vaccinated. VNSNY is not authorized to vaccinate family members.

**Individual Vaccine Questions & Concerns**

**Should people who have had COVID-19 or have tested positive for antibodies get the vaccine?**

Yes. At this time, we don’t know how long naturally acquired immunity to COVID-19 will last, and there have been cases of patients being reinfected. Getting the Moderna vaccine may provide stronger immunity than the natural immunity you developed after infection, so it’s safer to get the vaccine than to rely on your prior antibodies. A history of COVID-19 or positive antibody tests will not change how the vaccine affects you, or the possibility of side effects.

**I heard on the news that people with allergies should not take the vaccine right now, because a couple of people in England had allergic reactions after receiving the vaccine. Is there any information about people with allergies? Is that a contraindication for the vaccine?**

Two healthcare workers had allergic reactions to the Pfizer vaccine after receiving it in the UK, of over 130,000 people who received the vaccine in its first week. Both of these patients had a prior history of severe allergic reactions and carried EpiPens. There were no severe allergic reactions seen in either the Moderna or the Pfizer clinical trials. At this point, experts are advising caution only for those who have a history of severe allergy, like anaphylaxis, to a vaccine. Food allergies do not seem to be relevant to these vaccines, as the vaccines do not contain eggs or other allergens used in other vaccines. Those with a history of severe allergic reactions should consult their own physician.

**We have been battling HIV, cancer, other diseases for decades with little success and no real cure. And all of a sudden we have a vaccine that was developed in under one year. Sounds like the vaccine has been extremely rushed! I know for a fact that some side effects can take months to develop—simply not enough time passed to make a definite statement that the vaccine is totally safe. What is your take on this?**

These vaccines have been produced quickly because the scientific community prioritized their development after the new coronavirus was first identified in December 2019. The vaccine was based on pre-existing technology and knowledge about coronaviruses, which are much simpler than HIV or cancer. There are many steps in the vaccine testing and approval process in the United States, all designed to make sure a vaccine is safe and effective, and none of these steps have been skipped with the Moderna vaccine or any of the other COVID-19 vaccines. It has been in human clinical trials since early March, and has been tested on tens of thousands of volunteers with no serious adverse events.

**The FDA claims that four trial volunteers of Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine developed Bell’s palsy. Should I be worried about this?**

There were four cases of Bell’s palsy, a short-term form of facial paralysis, in the Pfizer trial. There were also three cases in the Moderna trial. Bell's palsy is experienced by approximately 4 in 10,000 people each year, so 4 cases in a test group of 20,000 (or 3 in a test group of 15,000) over a span of 6 months is not unusual. There is no evidence to demonstrate that the vaccine was the cause. However, researchers will be monitoring this side effect as the vaccine is distributed more widely.
I have heard mixed messages as to the safety of the vaccines for people who are immunocompromised. Can you speak to this at all?
The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines were not initially approved for immunocompromised or immunosuppressed people. If you are included in that group, we recommend you talk to your physician prior to vaccination.

I'm pregnant. I'm worried about taking the vaccine. What reactions or side effects will it have on the baby or me?
Neither the Moderna vaccine or the Pfizer vaccine were initially tested on pregnant people. Those trials are currently in progress, now that the vaccine has been deemed safe and effective. However, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists is recommending that vaccination be offered as an option for pregnant people, especially as they are more at-risk from COVID-19. We are suggesting that VNSNY staff who are pregnant discuss with their doctor whether they should get vaccinated.

I read an article last week that Pfizer and the FDA announced that 2 participants in clinical trials unfortunately died from the vaccine. Please advise.
There were two deaths in the vaccine group of the Pfizer trials, but the FDA determined these deaths were not caused by the vaccine. One died of pre-existing arteriosclerosis, and the other of a heart attack. In a clinical trial, which includes a large group of 44,000 people (including elderly subjects) and goes on for six months or more, it is normal and expected to see a few deaths. For comparison, the placebo group experienced four deaths. All six deaths, including those of the placebo recipients, represent events that occur in the general population at a similar rate.

Other Questions:
Where can I hear a recording of the conference call about COVID-19 vaccination?
Recordings of each week's call will be posted in the Vaccinate VNSNY! site on the VNSNY Intranet and In the Partners in Care Resource Center on Frontline. It may be take several days before the recordings are available for posting, however.