

COVID-19 Facts and Guidance for Faith and Community Leaders

According to a survey released by the American Psychiatric Association, many people have significant anxiety and concerns related to coronavirus disease. The study indicates that one in four people who seek help for mental health concerns turn to faith leaders before seeking help from clinical professionals.

Below is information to help faith and community leaders understand and support their communities.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, also known as coronavirus.

How is COVID-19 transmitted?

COVID-19 is spread in three main ways:

1. When you are breathing in air close to an infected person exhaling droplets and particles that contain the virus.
2. When these droplets and particles land on the eyes, nose, or mouth from a cough or sneeze.
3. When touching eyes, nose, or mouth with hands that have the virus on them.

What's the concern with the COVID-19 strains?

The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 keeps changing over time. These changes can lead to new versions of the virus, also known as new strains. Researchers have evidence that:

- **Some new strains may enable the coronavirus to spread faster from person to person.**
- **More infections can result in more people getting very sick or dying.**
- **New strains of the virus will continue to spread.**
- **The most significant risk of transmission is among communities with low vaccination rates.**

Therefore, vaccines remain the most effective way to protect yourself from COVID-19 and new strains. For this reason, it is important to get the updated COVID-19 vaccine each year.

How do COVID-19 vaccines work?

The vaccines teach your immune system how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. The vaccines never enter where your DNA is stored. Therefore, they do not change or interact with your DNA in any way. The vaccines do not contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. So, the COVID-19 vaccine can't give you COVID-19.



What are some side effects of being vaccinated?

Similar to those felt after regular vaccinations, side effects following a COVID-19 vaccination are common and often mild. These common side effects usually go away within 24 to 48 hours. Side effects can differ between age groups. Common side effects include pain where you got the shot, tiredness, fever, and chills. These common side effects are typical signs that the COVID-19 shot is working and building protection.

What are the benefits of being vaccinated?

Although the vaccine is not 100% effective and breakthrough cases are possible, vaccines help reduce the spread of the virus to your family and friends and effectively prevent long-term effects from the virus, hospitalization, and even death.

- **COVID-19 vaccines build protection.**
- **People who are fully vaccinated and keep up with yearly vaccinations can still get COVID-19 and experience symptoms, but for a shorter time. Chances of contracting severe complications from a COVID-19 infection remains far lower for vaccinated people.**
- **Vaccinated people have a lower overall risk of developing long-term complications from COVID-19, being hospitalized, or dying compared to people who have not received the COVID-19 vaccine.**
- **By being vaccinated, you help ensure that those with serious illnesses can get the care they need because hospitals won't be overwhelmed with treating COVID-19 patients.**

How can we protect our loved ones and prevent COVID-19?

To protect yourself and those you love, it is important to stay up to date with your yearly COVID-19 vaccine. In addition to vaccination, you can also protect yourself and others by staying home when you are sick, wearing a mask if you are feeling unwell and in high-risk settings, and practicing good hand hygiene- such as washing your hands regularly with soap and water. You can also follow the following steps:

- **Ask:** Reach out to members of your congregation that have the expertise or medical background to address the community and provide direction, evidence-based information, and resources.
- **Act:** Arrange for volunteers to assist members of your community who might need help securing online vaccination/testing appointments and/or transportation to and from these appointments. Keep updated regarding the latest recommendations around COVID-19 as these are constantly changing.
- **Advocate:** Encourage community members to voice their concerns for the most vulnerable, to speak up, to be the change they want to see, and to become champions of health for their communities. Advocate for your health and the health of your family by having conversations with your health care provider about what vaccines can do for you and your family.

Resources

- About COVID-19 | CDPH:
<http://bit.ly/4oQ1D2Y>
- LONG COVID Basics| CDC:
<https://bit.ly/46Lzjq7>
- Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) IDPH:
<http://bit.ly/Coronavirus-Disease-2019-IDPH>
- Immunizations Recommendations for 2025-2026
Respiratory Virus Season | IDPH
<https://bit.ly/3Ky0nBQ>