

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 has gone through a changing process many times during the pandemic. 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 are the most effective way to control and treat the virus, including the new strains.

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, they cannot make you sick with it.

If you experience side effects after getting the vaccine, such as feeling tired, fever, chills, etcetera, these are temporary and mean your body is learning how to fight the virus.



What are some side effects of being vaccinated?

Similar to those felt after regular vaccinations, side effects following a COVID-19 vaccination are often mild and disappear within a few days. They can differ between age groups. Common side effects include pain where you got the shot and tiredness. Although adverse events (serious health problems) are uncommon, they can result in long-term health issues. They often occur six weeks after receiving a vaccination.

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 hospitalization and death.

- COVID-19 vaccines build protection.
- People who are fully vaccinated and keep up with yearly vaccinations can experience breakthrough infections and symptoms but for a shorter time. Their chances of contracting a severe illness remain far lower than unvaccinated people.
- Vaccinated people have a lower overall risk of contracting COVID-19, needing hospitalization, and dying than people who have not received the vaccine. Since no vaccination is 100% effective, vaccinated individuals are still susceptible to “breakthrough infections” like COVID-19, but those result in a mild sickness or no symptoms at all.
- By being vaccinated, you help ensure that those with serious illnesses other than Coronavirus disease 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?

Getting vaccinated and following safety protocols like the use of masks, social distance, and washing your hands with soap and water is the best way to protect yourself and those you love. 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

- Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) CDC:
bit.ly/Coronavirus-Disease-2019-CDC
- Vaccines for COVID-19 | CDC:
bit.ly/Vaccines-for-COVID-19
- Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) IDPH:
bit.ly/Coronavirus-Disease-2019-IDPH