



Questions Answered About the COVID-19 Vaccine

By Nailah Thompson, DO, MPH

My 67-year old mom recently called to let me know she'd gotten her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. She said it went well, but she was surprised she was the only black or brown person she noticed getting the vaccine.

My mom isn't the only one concerned about this. We know that black and brown communities are getting the virus more and are [dying at higher rates than white communities](#), but fewer of us are getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

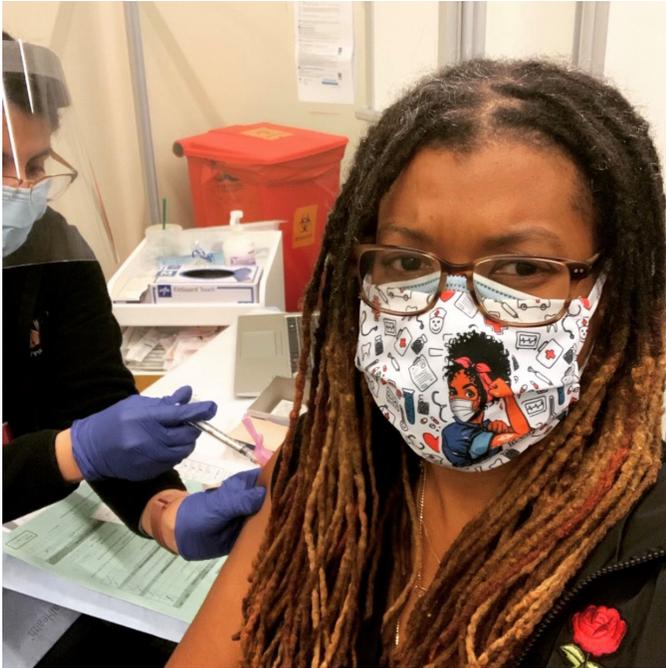
As a primary care doctor at the Kaiser Permanente Oakland Medical Center, I get a lot of questions about the vaccines. Many people are confused because they are the first of their kind. I also understand our

community's history of being mistreated by the medical profession, and our ongoing health disparities can make it hard to trust the health care system.

Below are some answers to questions that come up often with my patients, family and friends:

The vaccines were developed quickly. Are they safe?

Yes, they are safe. The vaccines were developed quickly because the new mRNA technology we hear so much about was already in the works, and because the federal government provided significant financial and other support to vaccine developers. A safety board approved every study, and the FDA carefully reviewed the data from every phase of every vaccine trial. I looked carefully at the science and the data and based on that – I decided it was safe to get vaccinated.



Does it alter your DNA?

It does not. The COVID-19 vaccine is a new type of vaccine that uses mRNA not DNA. mRNA teaches our cells to make specific proteins that stimulate our immune system to create antibodies to a virus. This keeps us from getting sick. mRNA does not interact with or alter DNA. In fact, cells break down and get rid of mRNA after it does its job.

Does it contain the COVID-19 virus?

No. The COVID-19 vaccine does not contain the virus and will not give you COVID-19.

Were communities of color part of the vaccine clinical trials?

Yes. Vaccine trial participants were from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, 10% African American/Black and 13-20% Latinx. They also included a significant number of people greater than 55 years old.

What about side effects?

You may have mild to moderate side effects in the first 24 to 36 hours, and that's normal.

It's a sign your body is building immunity against the virus. Some common side effects are fever, fatigue, headache, chills, muscle and joint pain. An extremely small number of people who have a prior history of allergies to vaccines have had an allergic reaction, which is why you will be monitored for 15 to 30 minutes after getting the vaccine. If you do have vaccine allergies, you should discuss the vaccine with your doctor.

Whether or not you decide to get vaccinated is an important personal decision. I decided to get the vaccine because I believe it's our best tool to end the pandemic and the suffering it's caused in our communities.

There have been challenges with getting enough vaccine supply, and Kaiser Permanente, like other health care systems, is working to get more. We're also working to ensure we're giving the vaccine equitably, making sure people who are at highest risk of getting infected, or dying from COVID-19, get vaccinated first.

Learn more about
COVID-19 vaccine myths
and facts at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)



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