



SAN JUAN COUNTY WASHINGTON

Department of Health and Community Services

Hot Topic 59: All About the Fall Bivalent Boosters

Your questions about the new COVID-19 bivalent booster vaccine, eligibility, and availability answered.

SAN JUAN COUNTY, WA. September 14, 2022 – The core message is simple: Get the COVID-19 bivalent booster this fall.

What is this bivalent booster? What makes this booster different from the vaccines that came before?

New bivalent booster vaccines will soon be available from Moderna and Pfizer. Bivalent Novavax boosters are not yet approved and will not likely be available any time soon. The updated bivalent COVID-19 boosters add Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 spike protein components to the current vaccine composition, helping to restore protection that has waned since previous vaccination—this is done by targeting variants that are more transmissible and immune-evading.

These booster vaccines contain two messenger RNA (mRNA) components of the COVID-19 virus. One of the original strain and one from the lineages of the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron variant. The former component provides a broad protection against COVID-19 and the latter component provides better protection against COVID-19 caused by the Omicron variant. Currently, most COVID-19 cases in the United States are caused by the BA.4 and BA.5 lineages of the Omicron variant. These lineages are predicted to circulate this fall and winter.

Who is eligible for a booster?

Individuals 12 years of age and older are eligible for a single booster dose of the bivalent vaccine if it has been at least two months since they have completed their primary vaccination series or have received the most recent booster dose with any authorized or approved monovalent COVID-19 vaccine.

Children ages 5 to 11 are expected to have access to a bivalent booster vaccine by December 2022. It is not clear when children under 5 will be given a bivalent booster recommendation.

Okay, but do I really need this booster?

Booster doses help provide continued protection against severe disease. Booster doses were previously recommended only for populations at high risk for severe COVID-19, but the recommendation expanded to include everyone 5 years and older to help increase protection against COVID-19 illness. This is especially important with the rise of more contagious variants and cases of COVID-19 increasing across the United States.

The COVID-19 vaccines authorized or approved in the United States are still very effective at reducing the risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19—even against variants. Still, the current vaccines may be associated with a drop in protection over time. Booster doses will increase vaccine-induced protection against COVID-19 and help immunity last longer.

"The new bivalent vaccine recommendations have been made very simple," stated SJC Health Officer Dr. Frank James. "If you are 12 years or older you are eligible for the updated vaccine if it has been 2 months or more since your last dose of vaccine (primary or booster). The single most important way to protect ourselves

and our high-risk family members from severe disease (hospitalization and death) is to get vaccinated and stay up to date on boosters.”

Most people in our community received their most recent booster more than three months ago. Do not wait more than six months after prior infection or vaccination to receive the bivalent booster. There is no benefit to waiting longer and the risk is significant.

When can I get my booster?

HCS is currently planning to offer mass bivalent booster clinics in October on San Juan, Orcas, and Lopez islands. For full clinic details please go to our [vaccine information page](#). It will be updated as soon as clinic details are confirmed.

What if I can't make it on those days? What if I need the booster sooner than HCS is offering?

You can continue to monitor the HCS webpage for future opportunities, contact your physician or pharmacy, or check for [other providers online here](#).

I haven't gotten my first dose yet/completed my primary series – can I still get those vaccines?

Yes! HCS will continue to offer regular clinics for primary series vaccinations. You can check for future clinics on our website [here](#).

Getting everyone (who is eligible) vaccinated with a primary series is still a top priority. COVID-19 remains a significant problem – over 400 people die each day from it still and it remains the third leading cause of death in the US. Hospitalization rates are 10 to 22 times higher in unvaccinated adults compared to vaccinated adults. People who are vaccinated are significantly less likely to get seriously sick (or sick at all) from COVID-19, compared to those who are unvaccinated. Vaccinations can also help prevent individuals from getting ill and developing the long-COVID symptoms reported by up to 50% of those who become ill from COVID-19.

Is this what our future will look like... Endless boosters?

Although it feels like COVID-19 has been with us for a long time, this virus is still very new. Vaccine booster schedules will become more predictable as the virus's behavior becomes more predictable to scientists. For example, we all are used to the yearly flu vaccination recommendation. This has become standard practice for many of us because the influenza virus is more predictable. The scientific and medical community is hard at work to understand the COVID-19 virus, and the path will become clearer the longer we are on it.

Will the bivalent booster protect me from the flu too?

No, it will not. The bivalent booster only provides immune protection from the COVID-19 virus. You will still need to get a flu vaccine to be protected from the influenza virus. You can receive both the bivalent booster and flu vaccines at the same time if your provider offers both. The bivalent booster is also safe to receive with regularly scheduled vaccines as well.

HCS will be offering free flu vaccines to ALL children under 18. For information about our upcoming flu clinics please visit our [website here](#). For information about our Vaccines for Children clinics please visit our [website here](#).

Relevant URLs:

- [HCS Vaccination Information Website](#)
- [Washington State Vaccine Location](#)
- [DOH Vaccine Booster Doses Information](#)
- Download Your Immunization Record ([Full Record](#) or [COVID-19 Only](#))

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About San Juan County’s Department of Health and Community Services

San Juan County’s Department of Health and Community Services is responsible for community and environmental health, mental health and substance abuse programs, senior services, affordable housing projects, and more. The department has staff and offices on Lopez, Orcas, and San Juan Islands. For more information about San Juan County’s Department of Health and Community Services, visit

www.sanjuanco.com/1777/Health-Community-Services.

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Note to Editor: Please share that readers may find ongoing information about this project by visiting the COVID-19 Vaccination Information webpage at <https://www.sanjuanco.com/1737/COVID-Vaccine-Info>.