

COVID-19 BASICS FOR COMMUNITY ELDERS



ELDER NEWSLETTER VOL. 4

What You Need To Know

If you are 55 and older your risk of contracting a severe case of COVID-19 is significantly higher than the rest of the population.

Those with severe cases of COVID-19 may require:

- Hospitalization
- Intensive care
- A ventilator to assist with breathing

COVID-19 can also result in death.

Has a vaccine been approved?

On December 11, 2020, the U.S. Federal Drug Administration (FDA) approved the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine under an

Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). We are pleased to announce that today GRHC is receiving our initial allocation of 975 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, to be followed by an additional 975 dose within 3 weeks to ensure that all 975 recipients receive both required doses of the vaccine per clinical protocol.

These doses, provided through the Phoenix Area Office of the Indian Health Service (IHS), are designated (as per the FDA) as Phase 1a distributions, to be used exclusively for Frontline Health Care Workers, Residents and Staff of Long-Term Care Facilities.

At this time, GRHC will receive two mRNA COVID-19 vaccines – *Pfizer* and *Moderna*. Both vaccines are proven to be approximately 95% effective in clinical trials and produce minimal side effects. The vaccines are administered in two doses.



COVID-19 Symptoms and Elders

Are COVID-19 symptoms different for older adults?

Older adults with COVID-19 may not show common symptoms such as fever or respiratory symptoms. Less common symptoms can include headache, or new dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell.

Additionally, more than two temperatures over 90 F° might also be a sign of fever in this elder population. Identification of these symptoms should prompt isolation and further evaluation for COVID-19.

COVID-19 Vaccine



Who will receive the vaccine first?

The COVID-19 vaccine will be given to priority groups as identified in the first phase of the vaccine rollout. Along with GRIC tribal government, Gila River Health Care is finalizing plans for receiving and administering the vaccines for our Community.

In the coming days, you will be informed about the vaccines' availability for the initial priority groups within our Community; and for others in the coming weeks and months.

What is a priority group?

Adults with high-risk medical conditions who possess risk factors for severe COVID-19 illness. This group includes Elders with health concerns and dialysis patients.

Why do elders need to take the vaccine?

Among adults, the risk for severe illness from COVID-19 increases with age, with older adults at highest risk. Severe illness means that the person with COVID-19 may require hospitalization, intensive care, or a ventilator to help them breathe, or they may even die. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself from COVID-19.

Elders and COVID-19 Vaccine Safety

Is the vaccine safe to use?

The vaccine has passed the safety data milestones required by FDA for Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). Data demonstrates that the vaccine was well tolerated across all populations with over 43,000 participants enrolled; no serious safety concerns observed.

Are there any side effects? If so, what are they?

The COVID-19 vaccine is intended to protect you from getting COVID-19. In order to receive the full benefits of the vaccine, the vaccine is given in two doses in a shot similar to the Flu vaccine. Common side effects include:

- Pain/Swelling at the injection site
- Fever
- Chills
- Tiredness
- Headache

What are the long term effects of the vaccine?

Scientists are still learning more about the virus that causes COVID-19. And it is not known whether getting the COVID-19 virus will protect everyone against getting it again, or, if it does, how long that protection might last.

The vaccine was tested in large clinical trials to establish what is currently known about its safety and effectiveness. As this vaccine is new, data on long term safety and vaccine effectiveness is not yet available.

What are the risks of not getting the vaccine?

By not getting vaccinated, you run the risk of getting infected with the COVID-19 virus. You may be asymptomatic and continue to spread the virus throughout the Community without your knowing it. This can cause great harm to vulnerable individuals and the elderly.

COVID-19 Prevention and Elders

What can I do to protect myself until a vaccine becomes available?

You should cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others, avoid close contact with people who are sick, stay 6 feet away from others, avoid crowds, and wash your hands often. Get more information about these and other steps you can take to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 at [GRHC.ORG/HUB](https://www.grhc.org/hub).

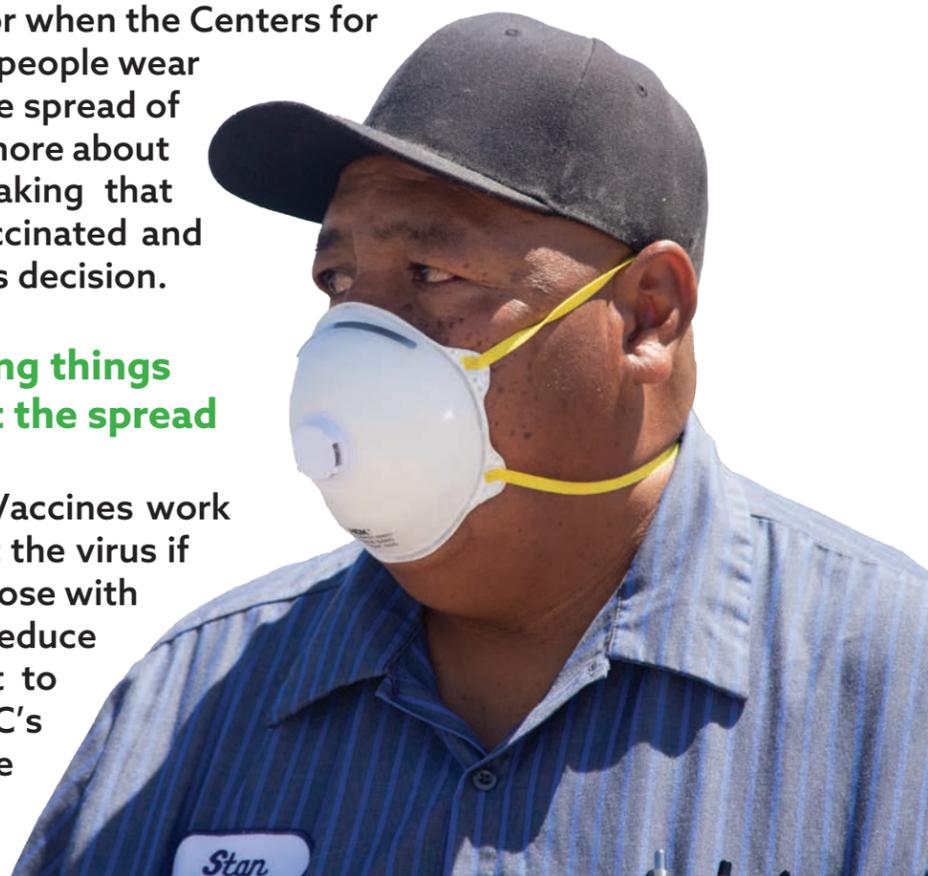
Will I still need to wear a mask after I am vaccinated?

Yes. While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it will be important for everyone to continue using all the tools available to us to help stop this pandemic, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing hands often, and staying at least 6 feet away from others.

There is not enough information currently available to say if or when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will stop recommending that people wear masks and avoid close contact with others to help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. Experts need to understand more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide before making that decision. Other factors, including how many people get vaccinated and how the virus is spreading in communities, will also affect this decision.

Why do we need to get vaccinated if we just keep doing things like physical distancing and wearing masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines work with your immune system so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Other steps, like covering your mouth and nose with a mask and staying at least 6 feet away from others, help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following CDC's recommendations to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from COVID-19.



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