First COVID-19 vaccine approved in the U.S. What does this mean for you?

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An illustration of a doctor holding a shot in one hand and a shield in the other hand, fighting against some kind of illness. Image: nadia_bormotova/Getty Images. Modified by Newsela staff.

The U.S. approved a new type of medicine for COVID-19 on December 11.

Soon, some people will be able to get the medicine, which is called a vaccine. Those people are the most at risk for getting COVID-19. This includes health care workers. It also includes people living in nursing homes.

But what does that mean for you? Read below to learn more about this new shot that could help protect you and your family against COVID-19.

What Is A Vaccine And How Does It Create Immunity?

Scientists create vaccines in labs. A vaccine is meant to act like something that causes an illness. This can include a virus like the chicken pox. It can also include a coronavirus. Vaccines are weaker than viruses, though. They do not make you sick.

Vaccines are often given as a shot. They help the body resist a particular infection. This process is called immunity. A person can develop immunity from a vaccine. They can also develop immunity from an earlier infection of a disease.

How Are Vaccines Developed?

Developing a vaccine is a process. To start, scientists study different compounds. These are molecules made up of two or more elements. They are looking for compounds that create immunity in cells.

Once the scientists find these compounds, they test them. Developing a vaccine usually takes years. But sometimes it can be faster. Drug companies developed the COVID-19 vaccine quicker than usual. This was meant to help protect the community.

What Type Of Data Is Collected On Vaccines?

All vaccines should be safe and that they work. To make this happen, researchers collect tons of data. This data can come in many forms.

It is important that the vaccine creates immunity for most people. It is also important to know how much of the vaccine you need for it to work. How long immunity lasts also matters. Finally, they'll want to know if there are any side effects. This could be something like a headache or fever.

Researchers continue to study vaccines after they are in use. They keep track of the data. They watch to see if any other issues come up.

What Does It Mean When A Vaccine Is Approved?

In the United States, all vaccines must be approved before use. This order comes from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This is a government group. They make sure food and drugs are safe. They make sure that drugs work. They do this for humans and animals.

First, a drug company sends an application to the FDA. It contains data about the treatment. Then, experts review the data. They decide if the treatment is safe enough. If all goes well, the FDA approves the treatment. This means it can be given out throughout the country.

When Might I Be Able To Get A COVID-19 Vaccine?

This depends on a few things.

First, the drug company needs to make millions of vaccine doses. Then, the vaccine needs to be shipped around the country. Government officials are creating a plan. They are working out when different people should get the vaccine.

Right now, the vaccine is only approved for people 16 years and older. That means younger children might still have to wait. There will more research. Hopefully, it will help the FDA expand its approval. Then, it may be given to younger people.

Quiz

1 Read the section "What Is A Vaccine And How Does It Create Immunity?"

Select the sentence from the section that explains HOW vaccines work.

(A) Scientists create vaccines in labs.

(B) Vaccines are often given as a shot.

(C) They help the body resist a particular infection.

(D) This process is called immunity.

2 Which question is answered in the section "How Are Vaccines Developed?"

(A) Why are vaccines important?

(B) Who developed the COVID-19 vaccine?

(C) How long does it usually take to develop a vaccine?

(D) Are all vaccines safe and effective?

3 If readers are looking for information on who will be the first to get the vaccine, what section should they read?

(A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-3]

(B) "How Are Vaccines Developed?"

(C) "What Type Of Data Is Collected On Vaccines?"

(D) "What Does It Mean When A Vaccine Is Approved?"

4 What can a reader learn by looking at the article's section titles?

(A) different steps for making a vaccine

(B) opinions of scientists about the COVID-19 vaccine

(C) information to read if they are curious about the vaccine

(D) types of data collected by scientists about the COVID-19 vaccine