

- Vaccination

Explaining difference between 'third or additional dose' and 'booster'

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When it comes to COVID-19 vaccines, there's understandable confusion over the terms "third or additional dose" and "booster" and who currently qualifies for which — and when. I'll try to clarify.

First, you need to stick with the same vaccine you originally received. If your first or second doses were, say, Moderna, you need to stick with Moderna. Do not mix vaccine types.

Next, whether it's called a "third or additional dose" or a "booster" — and whether it's the Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, or Johnson & Johnson vaccine — it's going to be the same vaccine you previously received. There's no difference.

So far, "third or additional doses" have been approved only for the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines. "Boosters" have been approved only for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Neither has yet been approved for the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

So who qualifies for the "third or additional dose?"

If you are moderately to severely immunocompromised, either by some sort of disease like cancer or uncontrolled HIV infection, or if you take some sort of medications like very high-dose steroids or chemotherapy, your immune system may not have responded very well to the first or second dose of either the Moderna or PfizerBioNTech vaccine. So it's recommended you receive a "third or additional dose" or shot of the Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at least 28 days after getting your second shot of that vaccine.

Medically speaking, this is not considered a "booster" shot, but a "third or additional shot" in the initial vaccine series. This does not apply to the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

So who qualifies for "boosters?" Right now, it's only for those who received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and you must wait at least six months after your initial two shots to get a third. You also have to fit under one of these categories:

you are 65 or older, you're a younger adult, 18 to 64, with underlying health conditions, or your job puts you at high risk for COVID-19.

The sheer breadth of qualifying medical conditions and occupations (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/booster-shot.html>), plus the lack of any proof requirements, mean just about anyone who got the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine can now seek out a "booster."

Everyone else must wait until Federal regulators authorize "boosters" of the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

Bottom line: These wonderful COVID-19 vaccines are safe (no matter what you've read or heard) and effective (in preventing serious illness and minimizing the likelihood of hospitalization or death) and are readily available.

Currently, less than 40% of our Northwest Georgia population has been fully immunized against COVID-19. If you haven't yet been vaccinated, please do so now. Do it for yourself,

for your loved ones, and for others in our community, especially those children under the age of 12 who are not yet eligible for vaccination.

And if you're eligible for that "third or additional dose" or that "booster," go ahead and get it, too.

COVID-19 immunizations as well as the "third or additional shot" and the "booster" are available at all ten Northwest Georgia county health departments. More information may be found here: <https://nwgapublichealth.org>.