Q: Who is eligible for the Pfizer COVID-19 booster vaccine based on the recent CDC recommendation?
A: On Sept. 24, the CDC approved Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for the following Pfizer vaccine recipients who completed their initial series at least six months ago:

- People 65 years and older
- Residents of long term care settings
- People aged 18–64 years with certain specified underlying medical conditions
- People aged 18-64 years who are at increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission because of their occupational or institutional setting, including health care workers.

Individuals who are immunocompromised due to certain health conditions have been eligible for a third dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine since Aug. 13.

Q: Why do I need a booster?
A: The current vaccines are still effective against the variants we are now seeing, particularly for protecting against serious illness that would require hospitalization or cause death. But according to the CDC, studies show that vaccine protection against the virus may decrease over time and be less able to protect against the Delta variant.

Q: Is the booster free?
A: Yes.

ELIGIBILITY

Q: When can I get a COVID-19 vaccine booster if I am not in one of the recommended groups?
A: People over the age of 16 not listed in the categories above can also get an off-label prescription from their physician for a booster dose if their physician believes it is appropriate for them. Additional populations may be recommended to receive a booster shot as more data become available.

Q: What is an off-label prescription?
A: Off-label prescriptions are a common practice in which physicians prescribe FDA-approved drugs for unapproved uses. Since the FDA does not regulate the practice of medicine, physicians regularly issue off-label prescriptions of FDA-approved drugs if they believe the off-label use is appropriate for the patient.

Q: What are the risks to getting a booster shot?
A: Reactions reported after getting the Pfizer booster shot were similar to that of the second shot in the two-shot primary series, according to the CDC. Fatigue and pain at the injection site were the most commonly reported side effects, and overall, most side effects were mild to moderate.
Q: Is there any difference in the composition of a booster shot and a regular shot?
A: No. The current boosters are another dose of the same COVID-19 vaccines used for the primary vaccine series. The purpose of a booster is to prolong or refresh protective immunity.

Q: What is the difference between a third dose and a booster shot?
A: The term “third shot” is used to describe a third dose that’s needed when a person’s immune response likely hasn’t responded fully to the vaccine after the first doses — such is the case for people who are seriously immunocompromised.

A booster is also a third dose, but it’s used when help is needed to prolong protective immunity in someone who responded fully after the first two doses.

Q: What if I can’t remember when I received my last COVID-19 vaccine shot?
A: You should check your CDC vaccination record card for the date of your second COVID-19 vaccination. If you do not have your vaccination card, contact your primary care provider or the retail pharmacy where you were first vaccinated. If you received your initial vaccine at a Houston Methodist vaccine clinic, your information should be in your MyChart account.

Q: When can children get a booster?
A: Currently, no vaccines are authorized for children 5 to 11 years of age. Pfizer recently submitted COVID-19 vaccine data on children ages 5 to 11 to the FDA for initial review. A formal submission to request EUA for the vaccine for children is expected to follow soon.

THIRD SHOTS FOR THE IMMUNOCOMPROMISED

Q: Will immunocompromised people get sicker if they contract COVID-19?
A: Yes. Research from the CDC suggests that immunocompromised people are more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19, are more likely to transmit it to household contacts and have breakthrough infections. According to the study from the CDC, in the U.S., 44% of hospitalized breakthrough cases are immunocompromised people.

GETTING A BOOSTER

Q: How can I get a booster shot?
A: Patients and the general public, who are included in one of the FDA and CDC’s recommended groups for the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine booster, can click here to make an appointment for a booster.

Q: Can I mix Moderna and Pfizer shots?
A: If you received the Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine initially, you will need to wait for new FDA/CDC authorization for a booster shot of the same vaccine. The limited amount of data so far seems to show that protection from the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines is holding up, so it is probably safe to wait if you prefer a booster of the same vaccine as your original series.

Q: Should I delay my flu shot until after I receive my Pfizer booster shot?
A: No. There is no need to delay a COVID-19 booster or your flu shot, as it is safe to get those at the same time. Here’s guidance from the CDC on that a story on the Houston Methodist blog, On Health.

Q: Do I need to show my vaccination card or other proof of being fully vaccinated to get my booster?
A: No. You do not need to show your CDC vaccination card to get your booster. You will self-attest that you have received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine. Remember to bring your card if you want all three shots represented on the card together.