

Community Weeklies
03.01.2021 Differences in Available Vaccines
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This weekend, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an emergency use authorization for a third COVID-19 vaccine, Johnson & Johnson's "Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine." We expect that doses of this new vaccine will arrive in Virginia, possibly in our area, as early as the end of this week. As new vaccines enter the market, people may start asking "Which vaccine is best for me?" The simple answer is that the best vaccine is the one that is available to you!

Like the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the new Johnson & Johnson vaccine is safe and effective. Like the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine underwent rigorous safety and efficacy review in clinical trials. Almost 45,000 people in eight countries participated in the Johnson & Johnson trials and the results of these extensive studies demonstrate that the vaccine is safe and effective. Unlike the Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is a viral vector vaccine, which means that a "vector," in this case a harmless virus, carries a message to cells that in turn help the body fight COVID. There are many advantages to this vaccine but the biggest advantages are that it only requires one dose and that it can be stored more easily than the mRNA vaccines.

You may have heard that some people are concerned that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is not as effective as the Pfizer or the Moderna vaccine. It is important to understand that in the clinical trials, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was shown to be "85% effective in preventing severe/critical COVID-19 occurring at least 28 days after vaccination" according to the FDA.

With all three COVID-19 vaccines, people may experience mild side effects from the vaccine, including a sore arm, mild body aches, or a low grade fever. These mild side effects are typically very short lived. After receiving your first dose, you will be invited to use V-SAFE, an after-vaccine health checker that will check in on your symptoms every day, including an option for telephone follow-up. Tools like V-SAFE are part of a national effort to ensure that safety monitoring continues even after vaccines have been rolled out.

When it comes to a COVID-19 vaccine, I strongly encourage you to accept whichever vaccine is offered to you first when you are eligible to receive a vaccine. The staff of the health department is working tirelessly to get shots in arms. The demand for COVID-19 vaccines continues to be very high. I believe that this continued demand reflects that the majority of our citizens understand that the sooner everyone is vaccinated, the sooner our community will be better protected and the sooner we can reach our new normal. If you plan to get vaccinated, but have not yet pre-registered to let the health department know of your interest, please visit <https://vaccinate.virginia.gov/> or call (877) 829-4682.