

## COVID-19 Vaccination FAQ

### Vaccine Requirement

#### **Why are we requiring the vaccine?**

As COVID-19 continues to spread throughout our communities, SWHR is taking necessary steps to protect employees, patients and members of our community. Safety is our No. 1 priority.

We are in the fight against COVID-19 together and the vaccines are the best infection prevention tool we have. Evidence is strong that COVID-19 vaccines help prevent the spread of the disease and reduce the risk of hospitalization and death. The Pfizer vaccine has been shown to be 88% effective against the Delta variant in preventing symptomatic disease and 96% effective against the Delta variant in reducing hospitalization compared to an unvaccinated population. This is vital to protect our patients and fellow care team members as that is the dominant strain in the community at this time.

#### **Is the Delta Variant more or less contagious/deadly than the original strain?**

Viruses evolve over time to become more efficient, which is what has emerged with the Delta variant. It is spreading at a rate 100% (or two times faster) than the original coronavirus and 50% more than the UK strain that we saw our surge from in December/January. The CDC recently stated that this strain is as contagious as chickenpox, which is highly contagious. It is important to note that infections from the Delta strain are almost exclusively infecting those unvaccinated not utilizing additional tools such as social distancing and masking. The infectivity rate for those vaccinated is less than 0.1%. Anyone infected can infect others. There is not enough data to establish if the Delta strain is deadlier than the prior strains. However, hospitalizations are increasing significantly with this strain, similarly to the prior surges.

#### **Why is it important that everyone at SWHR get vaccinated?**

People who become infected can inadvertently create the opportunity for new variants to develop and spread, like the Delta variant. The greatest concern would be that a new strain emerges resistant to our current vaccines. With rates so far of less than 0.1% for breakthrough infections for those vaccinated, the risk of a new variant as well as further morbidity and mortality from coronavirus decreases significantly with vaccination. The faster we can eradicate these variants, the faster all of us can resume activities safely.

#### **What do I need to do to become “fully” vaccinated?**

To be fully vaccinated, employees must have received both doses of Pfizer or Moderna or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and be at least 14 days beyond the last dose. Employees vaccinated close to the September 30th deadline may work from home through this 14-day period.

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#### **Where should I send verification that I have been vaccinated?**

Verification should be sent to our confidential, clinical Employee Health Team at [SWHREmployeeHealth@texashealth.org](mailto:SWHREmployeeHealth@texashealth.org).

#### **What documents are considered acceptable as verification that I have been vaccinated?**

Acceptable documents include your CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Card or copy of vaccination from your physician, pharmacy or medical clinic.

#### **Will I receive a response once I submit my information to Employee Health?**

Yes. You will receive an acknowledgement from our Employee Health RN, Yolanda Haggerty.

#### **Why are we not being given more time since there is a waiting period required between shots?**

Employees have 63 days between the announcement of mandatory vaccines to the deadline of September 30th. Pfizer doses are spaced 21 days apart and Moderna doses are spaced 28 days apart. SWHR employees will be able to obtain their vaccine from THR. THR Employee Health teams across the system are adding vaccine clinic dates to offer convenient times to get the vaccine.

With COVID-19 case rates rising dramatically, we have no time to waste in doing everything we can to protect each other and the community.

### Return to Office

#### **If Delta is so bad, why are we still returning to the office?**

We know many employees want to be back in an office setting where we can work more cohesively and collaboratively together. Being together in one location leads to increased innovation and faster, more creative problem solving. It is safe for us all to be together if we are vaccinated. The risk of breakthrough infections for those vaccinated is low at less than 0.1%, and lower when social distancing and masks are utilized in common areas. We continue to monitor the latest data and CDC recommendations and will adjust our processes to continue focusing on our safety.

#### **Why are remote workers required to get the vaccine?**

SWHR employees may be called on to periodically enter care facilities, member homes, and into the office to support operational efforts. We need all employees to protect themselves, our patients, our providers and the community at large. We need to lead the way by helping to end this pandemic.

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### **Will we still need to wear masks in common areas at work? If so, what is considered a common area?**

Yes, we will still require employees to wear a mask in common areas of the office to keep all employees safe. Common areas include lobbies, elevators, breakrooms, hallways, work rooms, restrooms and conference rooms. There will be signs clearly designating these areas.

### **Will contractors, vendors and visitors be required to be vaccinated?**

The vaccine requirement extends to all such third parties that come onsite to our office. Contractors or third parties who are not vaccinated may not come on-site.

### **Would you address those employees that interface with PCP clinics and their plan for returning to any in office risks and strategies and plans?**

Many of our positions require interactions with clinics and patients for effective population health management. For those positions that do so, risk mitigation strategies, including vaccination, are key to be able to engage safely and effectively. Healthcare delivery has continued with very little risk of infection from Coronavirus for those vaccinated and following safe practices.

## COVID Safety and Health Questions

### **If I need time to recover from the vaccine, do I need to use my Sick Time/PTO?**

Yes, employees who need a few days to recover from vaccine side effects should use Sick Time or PTO.

### **Will vaccine boosters be mandated as well?**

There is no indication yet that boosters will be needed. We will continue to assess this need based on the CDC recommendations and peer-reviewed data.

### **What do I do if I've had COVID-19 recently?**

Unvaccinated employees who have had COVID-19 should receive the first dose of the vaccine as soon as they are at least 14 days past their diagnosis date and 24 hours without fever. This approach aligns with what other health systems are doing regarding individuals who have had COVID-19.

### **Why do I need the vaccine if I've had COVID-19?**

The antibody response from unvaccinated patients infected with a prior strain of COVID-19 was fourfold less potent against the Delta variant. However, vaccination of individuals with a prior COVID-19 infection boosted the immune response well above the threshold that would neutralize the Delta variant. With the growing presence of the Delta variant in the DFW region, [a study just published](#) reinforces the importance of vaccination, even if you have previously had COVID-19.

As observed in [this study](#), individuals with a prior COVID-19 infection who were vaccinated generated a neutralizing antibody response against the variants tested that was three to four

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times higher compared to vaccinated people who were not previously infected. These results indicate that vaccination in individuals with a prior COVID-19 infection provides broad protection against multiple variants.

### **Why aren't we waiting until the vaccines have full FDA approval?**

All three vaccines currently being distributed in the US have FDA approval. Emergency Use Approval ("EUA") still requires clinical efficacy from phases 1, 2, and 3 clinical trials to have been completed as well as demonstration of consistent and reliable production standards in order to obtain FDA approval. An EUA allows production of the vaccine at the same time as the clinical trials, so that when clinical efficacy and consistent production standards can be demonstrated FDA approval can occur and the vaccine would be immediately available for widespread distribution. The Pfizer vaccine has been given to more than 189 million individuals in the U.S. and more than 800 million worldwide. The data has remained consistent that the vaccine is safe and effective. In addition, studies have shown that the vaccine helps protect against new variants, such as the Delta variant.

A recent real-world [effectiveness study](#) from the United Kingdom demonstrated that in those who were fully vaccinated, the Pfizer vaccine reduced risk of hospitalization from the Delta variant by 96% compared to individuals who are unvaccinated.

Evidence continues to build that COVID-19 vaccines provide high degrees of protection against infection. Early on we had to rely on clinical trial data, but we're now seeing how the vaccine protects more people as they go about their daily lives. Data show that risk of COVID-19, including severe illness, is reduced by more than 90% among people who are fully vaccinated with one of the mRNA vaccines, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. You can view the studies [here](#) and [here](#). Data also suggest that COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the United States [offer protection against most variants currently spreading in this country](#).

### **Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for individuals wanting to start a family, or who are pregnant or breastfeeding?**

Individuals should consult their physician for questions specific to their situation. In general, though, it has been shown that the vaccine is safe for those wanting to start a family, as well as those who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

### **School is starting back up for kids, how is the Delta affecting kids?**

The Delta variant is far more contagious than the original strain, and kids are becoming infected which puts those adults around these kids at risk, particularly those unvaccinated. Current data does not suggest that the Delta variant is more serious than the prior variants for children.

### **For those who have recovered from Covid, do you recommend both shots? Some sources suggest only one may be necessary.**

The CDC based on levels of neutralizing antibodies circulating from those with prior COVID infections continues to recommend full vaccine with one of the three FDA approved vaccines. The existing antibodies from prior infection does not consistently remain at a level considered high enough to mitigate the risks associated with infection.

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### Vaccine Availability

#### **How do I sign up to get a vaccine at THR?**

To obtain a vaccine from THR, please follow the 2 steps below. If you need assistance, please reach out to [Yolanda Haggerty](#) or [Brooke Aranda](#).

1. You will need to register for an account. If you do not already have account, you will need to register as a “New User” with THR Ready Set at: <https://texashealth.readysetsecure.com/rs/>.
2. To select and confirm your vaccine appointment, visit the THR “Sign Up Genius” at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c054da8ac2aa6f94-covid191>.

#### **Do I have to get the vaccine through THR?**

No. You may choose to get your vaccination from your provider of choice. Please visit [www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov) to find a vaccination provider near you.

#### **If I have one dose of the vaccine, am I considered compliant with the SWHR requirement?**

No. Employees need to be fully vaccinated to be considered compliant. To be fully vaccinated, employees must have received both doses of Pfizer or Moderna or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and be at least 14 days beyond the last dose.

### Exception Requests

#### **What if I have a medical or other reason not to get the vaccine?**

Medical or religious exceptions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and granted as may be appropriate under the law. Requests for exceptions should be submitted by close of business (COB) August 16 to Employee Health at [SWHREmployeeHealth@texashealth.org](mailto:SWHREmployeeHealth@texashealth.org) so that requests will have time to be processed and individuals who do not receive an exception still have time to comply with the mandate.

#### **Where should I send my Exception Request?**

Exception requests should be emailed to our confidential clinical Employee Health Team at [SWHREmployeeHealth@texashealth.org](mailto:SWHREmployeeHealth@texashealth.org).

#### **How will I know if my exception request has been approved or denied?**

You will receive a response to your request from Employee Health via email.

#### **What if my exception request is denied?**

SWHR has set August 16 as the deadline to apply for exceptions. This allows time for individuals to become fully vaccinated by the September 30 deadline, if their request for an exception is not approved.