COVID-19 Vaccines – Monovalent vs. Bivalent

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You may have heard the terms "monovalent" or "bivalent" being used to describe COVID-19 vaccines. Let's talk about the differences between these two types of vaccines, and the importance of getting an updated bivalent booster when eligible.

What are the differences between monovalent and bivalent vaccines?

A monovalent vaccine is a vaccine with one strain of a virus.

A bivalent vaccine is a vaccine with two strains of a virus.

Many different vaccines have both monovalent and bivalent versions, including flu vaccines and COVID-19 vaccines.

Which COVID-19 vaccines are monovalent, and which are bivalent?

The original COVID-19 vaccines for most primary series* and original boosters** are monovalent. These vaccines were created from the original strain of the virus that causes COVID-19 illness.

The updated Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 boosters are bivalent. They were created with the original strain of COVID-19, and newer omicron variant strains, BA.4 and BA.5.

Are bivalent vaccines more effective than monovalent?

Initial data for the updated boosters have shown that bivalent COVID-19 boosters provide broader protection against COVID-19 illness than monovalent boosters and can lengthen the period of protection from severe illness, hospitalizations, and/or death, especially from the omicron variant.

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children 6 months-4 years now includes two monovalent Pfizer doses and one bivalent Pfizer dose.

The Novavax booster is monovalent and is available to adults who have completed a primary series but have not previously received a COVID-19 booster – and if they cannot or will not receive an updated bivalent mRNA booster. Novavax boosters **do not target omicron variant strains.*

Why is it important to get a bivalent booster?

It's important to get a bivalent booster because it's the only type of COVID-19 vaccine that was created to protect against the most dominant omicron strains of COVID-19 currently circulating in the US.

Should I get a bivalent booster if I've already had COVID-19 or received a prior monovalent booster?

Yes, it is recommended that you get an updated bivalent booster if you are eligible despite previously contracting COVID-19 or prior monovalent booster. For maximum effectiveness, individuals who recently had COVID-19 may consider delaying any COVID-19 vaccination, including the updated booster dose, by 3 months from the start of their symptoms or positive test.

Do I have to get a specific brand for my bivalent booster?

- Children 6 months – 4 years old should receive an updated bivalent dose/booster that is the same brand as their primary series.

- Children 5 years old who completed a Pfizer primary series may only receive an updated Pfizer bivalent booster.

- Children 5 years old who completed a Moderna primary series may receive an updated Moderna or Pfizer bivalent booster.

- People 6 years and older may receive a Moderna or Pfizer bivalent booster regardless of which brand they received for their primary series.