

BILH Booster Requirement for COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions

How is BILH defining "fully vaccinated" or "up to date" with COVID-19 vaccination?

At this time, "fully vaccinated" is defined as a staff member having received the primary COVID-19 vaccination series plus the appropriate booster shot, once they are eligible. Specifically, staff members must receive a third mRNA vaccination (Moderna or Pfizer) once they are five months from their second dose. Staff who received the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine will need a booster shot once two months have passed from their first dose. This is the same as the CDC term being ["up to date"](#) with your COVID-19 vaccinations. You can learn more about booster shots on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](#).

When do I need to get my booster in order to be considered up-to-date?

Beginning March 1, 2022, a booster will be required as a condition of employment for employees who received a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine series five or more months ago or received a Janssen/Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine two or more months ago.

What if I am not eligible for a booster yet?

Based on when you had your initial vaccination, you may not be eligible for a booster until after the March 1 deadline. You will have one month from your eligibility date to become up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines.

Why is BILH changing its definition of fully vaccinated for COVID-19?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [strongly recommends](#) COVID-19 vaccine booster doses for individuals over the age of 12. BILH, along with other hospitals and health care systems in Massachusetts, not only support this guidance but we believe it is the best way to ensure that we are as prepared as possible for the expected next variant or surge.

There is considerable [data](#) showing that vaccine effectiveness wanes over time and that [booster shots offer improved protection](#) against infection and also prevent severe disease, hospitalization and death. You are less likely to get infected with COVID-19 if you are up to date with your COVID-19 vaccination and therefore, less likely to spread the virus to others if you don't become infected in the first place.

We don't know what the characteristics of the next variant will be, so we must prepare now to ensure that we are able to maintain our commitment to safe patient care.



Will I need to get another booster in the fall? Will this be an annual requirements?

BILH will continue to monitor clinical guidance as it relates to all vaccinations, and will adjust its policy to best support staff and patient safety. Staying up to date with all of your vaccinations, including against COVID-19, will provide the best protection for you, our patients and our community.

I was recently infected with COVID-19. How soon can I get my booster?

You can receive your booster as soon as you are cleared to come out of isolation/return to work. Please contact Employee Health if you would like to pursue a temporary medical exemption that would provide you additional time to meet the booster requirement.

Where can I get COVID-19 vaccinations?

BILH Employee Health will continue to provide on-site opportunities to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. There is also a [growing list of community clinics](#) offering COVID-19 vaccine, free of charge, throughout the state of Massachusetts.

What if I have an exemption that has been approved for COVID-19 vaccine?

At the time of the introduction of the mandatory vaccination policies in 2021, BILH went through a comprehensive and interactive process for any employee who sought an exemption from the COVID-19 vaccination. All exemption decisions made during this process will remain in place as appropriate for each individual case; you do not need to re-apply for an exemption.

What if I would like to apply for an exemption for the first time?

Please visit your hospital/business unit's intranet to complete a medical or religious exemption form.

Will I be paid if I am out of work due to post-vaccine symptoms?

The COVID-19 vaccine may cause side effects. Most side effects are mild and short-term, and not everyone gets them. Staff members who develop moderate to severe symptoms that interfere with their daily activities should remain out of work until symptoms go away. Staff who meet this criteria will be paid if they miss a scheduled shift during the first 48 hours after vaccination.



What if I have prior immunity from a COVID-19 infection?

The CDC strongly recommends that all eligible people receive primary vaccination and booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, even those who have had prior COVID-19 infection. Antibody testing is not recommended for vaccine decision-making. Information about the protection offered by infection with SARS-CoV-2 (natural immunity), or infection combined with vaccination (hybrid immunity) is still evolving, especially as new variants emerge. Vaccination remains the safest strategy for preventing future SARS-CoV-2 infections, hospitalizations, long-term complications, and death.

BILH continues to follow CDC and Massachusetts DPH guidance on clinical considerations for the use of COVID-19 vaccines. As an employee, you are still required to be vaccinated even if you have recovered from COVID-19. People who were treated for COVID-19 with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma will need to wait a while after recovering before they can get vaccinated; however, most people can safely undergo COVID-19 vaccination once they have recovered from their illness and meet criteria to come out of isolation. Guidance on the timing of vaccination following natural infection is being monitored closely and BILH policies will be updated as the situation changes and additional information becomes available.

Can I get an antibody test to determine whether I need a COVID-19 booster?

Antibody tests for COVID-19 look for the presence of antibodies made in response to a previous infection or vaccination. They are an indicator of the body's efforts to fight off the SARS-CoV-2 virus. None of the [currently authorized SARS-CoV-2 antibody tests](#) have been validated to evaluate specific immunity or protection from SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Antibody testing is [not currently recommended](#) to assess:

- Immunity to COVID-19 following COVID-19 vaccination
- The need for vaccination