

The COVID Vaccine - A 2023 Approach

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In April 2023, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a “2nd bivalent mRNA booster vaccine for seniors and immunocompromised populations.” The FDA notes that this change was meant to simplify COVID vaccine recommendations going forward.

Unfortunately, terms like “mRNA,” “bivalent,” and “2nd booster” have created confusion for many of us, and, in particular, for nursing home populations where many residents are over age 65 and/or have relative degrees of immunocompromise.

Today, almost all of us have antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, either due to prior infection or vaccination. We’re at a place from a population standpoint where vaccination **SHOULD** be simplified.



There are a few key talking points that clarify communication:

- A “bivalent” vaccine implies a “current” or “2023” vaccine. That is, this vaccine targets the current types, or “strains,” of COVID circulating in the community. Compare this to an annual flu shot, where we ask each year if the “formulation” of the vaccine covers the current “strain” of flu. The bivalent vaccine is a current, up-to-date, vaccine. And as COVID mutates, our vaccine will likely change again in the future.
- Regardless of age, if you haven’t yet had a bivalent, or “current” COVID shot, one vaccine is recommended. This is true for both of these two populations: 1) those who have never been vaccinated; and 2) those who have only had a monovalent vaccine.
- For seniors, age 65 and older, who have had a bivalent vaccine already, they may receive one additional vaccine at least 4 months after their last bivalent vaccine. The FDA uses the word “may,” instead of “should,” suggesting the body of evidence of this repeated vaccine is still evolving.
- If you’re immunocompromised, it may also be beneficial to schedule a bivalent vaccine, but that decision should be an individualized discussion between provider and patient.

This guidance will continue to change, but for now, the advice in our long-term care community is simple:

- If you’ve not had a bivalent vaccine, go get one. And for now, just one is all you need.

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