COVID-19 vaccine: Top 10 things you need to know

From Dr. Robert Citronberg, Executive Medical Director of Infectious Disease and Prevention

1. Vaccinating as many people as quickly as possible against COVID-19 remains the only way to end the pandemic. New variants will continue to spread until enough of the population is vaccinated.

2. People 5 and older can get vaccinated. Find out more at aah.org/vaccine.

3. The COVID-19 vaccines available in the U.S. are very safe and effective against most variants. While vaccinated people can get infected with a variant, the chances of getting very sick or dying from COVID-19 are much less than for those who are not vaccinated.

4. The benefits of the vaccine far outweigh the risks. This doesn't mean the vaccines don't have side effects – they can – but the consequences of getting COVID-19 are far worse.

5. Many people who receive the vaccine report side effects including pain at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain, nausea and fever. These side effects often indicate a person's immune system is responding properly to the vaccine.

6. Vaccination is strongly recommended during pregnancy, and there is evidence that COVID-19 can be worse during pregnancy. The vaccines are very effective in pregnant women.

7. The Pfizer vaccine is administered in two doses given no less than 21 days apart. The Moderna vaccine is administered in two doses given no less than 28 days apart. It’s important to get both doses to ensure full protection.

8. Once you’re fully vaccinated, you can start doing more of the things you stopped doing because of the pandemic. Because of the spread of variants, you may need to wear a mask and maintain social distancing in some settings or where required by laws, rules, regulations or local guidance.

9. If you have a weakened immune system because of an underlying health condition or your age, you should continue to wear a good quality mask in public, even if you have already been vaccinated. Some people with weakened immune systems do not respond completely to the vaccine.

10. Our top priority is to administer the vaccines safely and equitably. The vaccine is available at many of our clinics, and you can find a location near you at aah.org/vaccine.