

How Is The New Booster Different?

Whereas the initial Covid vaccine boosters targeted only the original strain of the coronavirus, **the updated boosters are designed to add protection against omicron subvariants**. For that reason, the modified shots will be the only boosters available for teens and adults moving forward.

The newly authorized shots **target the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants**.

As of Tuesday, BA.5 accounted for at least 87% of new U.S. cases. BA.4 and a similar sublineage, BA.4.6, made up around 11%.

"The updated Covid-19 boosters are formulated to better protect against the most recently circulating Covid-19 variant." CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a statement on Thursday.

Pfizer's and Moderna's trials of their bivalent vaccines in people studied a formulation that targeted the original omicron strain. The updated version, however, was tested in laboratory studies, which found that **the boosters generated strong antibody responses against BA.4 and BA.5**. Laboratory tests *"so far have been a very good predictor of how well the vaccines protect against infection, as well as protecting against severe disease and hospitalization and death,"* said David Montefiori, a professor at Duke University Medical Center.

Who should get a booster?

The FDA authorized **Pfizer's shot for people ages 12 and up and Moderna's for ages 18 and up**.

For those who are up to date on their Covid vaccinations, the updated booster constitutes a **fourth, fifth, or sixth shot**, depending on one's age and health status.

But some vaccine experts wonder whether the shots are necessary yet for young, healthy people, given the lack of clinical trial data to demonstrate how well they work against the newer omicron subvariants.

Nonetheless, Pablo Penaloza-MacMaster, an assistant professor of microbiology-immunology at Northwestern University, said **the potential benefits seem to outweigh the risks**. *"The way that I look at it right now is that it seems like there's not much to lose,"* he said.

When is the ideal timing for this booster?

The CDC suggests that people **wait at least two months since their most recent Covid shots** to get the latest shots.

People who are **elderly or immunocompromised should get boosted as soon as they meet those qualifications**, Montefiori said. But he suggested that there's likely to be more wiggle room in the timing for young, healthy people.

"The longer you wait to get the boost, the more potent of a boosting effect it's going to have," he said. But for those who hold off, he added, *"there's that trade-off between **waiting to get boosted so that you have a stronger boosting effect and the risk of getting infected while you're waiting to get the boost.**"*

Montefiori, who is 68, said he got his fifth shot three weeks ago and plans to wait three months for his bivalent booster.

The CDC advises that **people who recently had Covid** consider delaying their boosters until **three months after their symptoms started or, if they were asymptomatic, since their positive Covid tests**.

Penaloza-MacMaster said his research suggests that **healthy people of all ages could even wait six months between shots or following Covid infections**.

But Montefiori said **it's hard to know how long immune protection lasts after a Covid infection**.

"The best advice that I would give people is to get the bivalent boost as soon as they're eligible to, regardless of whether or not they've been infected, because of the uncertain nature of how much that infection really boosted your immunity," he said.