There are currently two COVID-19 vaccines which have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to be distributed and administered in the United States. They are the Pfizer-Biontech COVID-19 vaccine and the Moderna vaccine.

Who should be vaccinated?
Everyone over the age of 16 should be vaccinated, unless they have a history of serious allergic reactions to the flu vaccines or if your healthcare provider has advised against it. Currently vaccines will not be given to children under the age of 16 because the clinical trials conducted to date have focused on adults. At this time the Moderna vaccine will not be given to anyone under 18.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?
Some people will experience symptoms like soreness at the injection site, aches, or slight fever. If you have experienced more severe reactions from previous vaccinations, you should consult with a health care provider before getting the COVID vaccine. It is also recommended that before getting vaccinated you tell the vaccination provider if you have a fever or a bleeding disorder, are on a blood thinner, are immunocompromised, or take medicine that affects your immune system.

How do vaccines work?
The purpose of a vaccine is to introduce elements of a virus to trigger our bodies to produce proteins which build antibodies which fight the virus if we are exposed to it. The vaccine contains no live virus.

How will the vaccine be given?
Both vaccines require two doses of the same vaccine. The time between the two doses varies somewhat, three weeks for the Pfizer vaccine and four weeks for the Moderna.

Are the vaccines safe?
The results so far are extremely good. Tens of thousands of people were vaccinated and followed as part of the clinical trials and there have not been any serious incidents.

Reporting problems or bad reactions after getting a COVID-19 vaccine.
If you experience serious reactions contact a health provider as soon as possible. A national system has been established to collect data on all adverse reactions (Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System: VAERS).

RWDSU Local 108 member Camille Yelverton was vaccinated along with other workers at Merakey long-term residential hospice in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. “I got my vaccine to protect myself, my family, and residents here at the facility. It’s important to get the shot!” she said.

More information: The Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) is a good source to get updated information on COVID-19 and the COVID vaccines.

For more information from the RWDSU Health and Safety Department, contact Jessica Garcia at: jgarcia@rwdsu.org or (212) 684-5300.
Can we stop wearing face coverings once we have been vaccinated?

No. Stopping the pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines work with your immune system so that your body is better able to fight the virus if you are exposed. Face coverings help reduce the chance of being exposed to the virus and spreading it to others.

Is getting the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory?

No, no governmental agency is making vaccination mandatory. The federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) has stated that employers may require their employees get vaccinated in order to maintain employment. If you are faced with this issue, contact your union representative for assistance.

How do I get access to the vaccine?

Each state is setting up their own vaccine programs and guidelines. Vaccinations are likely to be available at medical centers, health clinics, drugstores and some workplaces. You may want to contact your union rep for more information to learn when you are eligible for vaccination.

What is the priority order for availability to get vaccinated?

Each state will be establishing a priority system for vaccinating residents but most are following the recommendations of the CDC. The CDC recommends the following phase-in order for determining who should be vaccinated first. They are: (1a) healthcare workers and long-term care facility residents; (1b) frontline essential workers and people aged 75 and older; (1c) people aged 65-74, people aged 16-64 with underlying medical conditions, and other essential workers such as food service, housing, public safety, and high-risk factor seniors. The availability of vaccines will be dependent on when and how many vaccines the states receive. All vaccines will be free.