

## The Covid-19 vaccination programme Community Conversations Information Pack

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## 1. About the Covid-19 vaccines

### Available vaccines

- There are three approved vaccines being used at the moment: one made by Pfizer/BioNTech, one by Oxford/AstraZeneca and one by Moderna.
- Both vaccines have been shown to be safe and offer very high levels of protection against the effects of COVID-19.
- There are no animal or foetal products in any of the vaccines.
- The vaccines will not alter your DNA / genetic material.
- The vaccines are only available from the NHS to eligible groups and it is a free vaccination. You cannot pay to receive the COVID-19 vaccination privately.

### How the vaccines work

- Like all vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccines teach your body to fight the virus.
- The vaccines work by making a protein from the virus that is important for creating protection.
- The protein works in the same way they do for other vaccines by stimulating the immune system to make antibodies and cells to fight the infection.
- The components of the vaccine leave the body within a few days.
- The Vaccine Knowledge Project has produced a short animation which explains how vaccines work  
<https://vk.ovg.ox.ac.uk/vk/how-do-vaccines-work>

### Doses

- People need two doses of the vaccine to give them the maximum level of protection.
- Evidence shows that people build up better protection to COVID-19 symptoms when the vaccine is given in two, smaller doses, with an interval between them.
- The second dose should be given between 3 and 12 weeks after the first. For most people it will be given at 11-12 weeks

### How effective are the vaccines and how long do they last?

- All three vaccines have been shown to be highly effective at stopping people from becoming seriously ill from COVID-19.
- Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective – some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but this should be a lot less severe
- We expect these vaccines to work for at least a year – if not longer – but this will be constantly monitored.
- The vaccine helps prevent people becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 but they may still spread the virus to others so it is still very important to follow

guidance – in particular, wearing a mask, washing your hands and keeping two metres apart.

### **Priority groups**

- It is important that the people who are at the greatest risk from COVID-19 get the vaccine first.
- The order in which people are offered vaccinations has been determined by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the independent expert advisory committee that advises the UK on immunisation and vaccine safety.
- Their recommendations are based on preventing death due to COVID-19 and the need to protect health and social care staff and systems.
- They also reflect the fact that evidence currently shows that the single greatest risk of death from COVID-19 is age.
- They identified nine priority groups and recommended that they are vaccinated in the following order:
  1. Care home residents and staff
  2. People aged 80 and over and frontline health and social care workers
  3. People aged 75 and over
  4. People aged 70 and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
  5. People aged 65 and over
  6. People aged 16 to 64 with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality and those who are in receipt of a carer's allowance or who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill.
  7. People aged 60 and over
  8. People aged 55 and over
  9. People aged 50 and over
- On 31 March 2021, the JCVI updated its guidance to advise that people over 16 who are living with an adult who has a weakened immune system, such as those with blood cancer, HIV or those on immunosuppressive treatment should be prioritised for the vaccine alongside people in cohort 6.
- It is estimated that taken together, these groups represent around 99% of preventable mortality from COVID-19. Full details are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020>
- First vaccinations have been offered to the people in these nine groups and the rollout moved to phase two (under 50s) in April. The JCVI has recommended that this continues based on age with vaccinations being offered to people in the following order: 40-49, 30-39 and 18-29 year olds. The expectation is that all adults will be vaccinated by the end of July 2021.

### **People who shouldn't have the vaccine**

- You should not have the COVID-19 vaccine if you have ever had a serious allergic reaction (including anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of the same vaccine or any of the ingredients in the vaccine. Clinicians will discuss this with people before vaccinating them.

- The latest guidance is that pregnant women should be offered COVID-19 vaccines at the same time as people of the same age or risk group. (See page 10 for details)

## 2. Getting a vaccination

### Vaccination services

There are several different places where people can get their vaccination.

- Some GP practices are working together to provide them to their patients from centres in local communities and they will contact patients to invite them when it is their turn.
- There are also four large vaccination centres (called community vaccination centres) and nine community pharmacy centres across West Yorkshire, with more due to open shortly.
- The four large centres in West Yorkshire are
  - ❖ Spectrum Community Health, Navigation Walk, Wakefield
  - ❖ Jacobs Well, Bradford
  - ❖ John Smith's Stadium, Huddersfield
  - ❖ Elland Road, Leeds
- For Calderdale, the community vaccination centre is Boots, on Market Street in Halifax.
- People who are eligible for a vaccine and who live within reasonable travelling distance of one of these centres will get a letter from the NHS national booking system inviting them to make an appointment. People can choose to book at one of these centres or to wait for their GP to invite them for an appointment.
- The NHS will follow up with people that haven't booked their appointment, as a reminder.
- People who are housebound will be contacted by their GP services about alternative ways to get vaccinated.
- People in the eligible age groups or who receive a carer's allowance can contact the NHS National Booking Service to book an appointment ([www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination](http://www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination) or call 119). The homepage will show which ages are currently able to book.

### What to expect

- All the centres are designed to keep people safe from Covid-19 and have strict cleaning and disinfecting procedures and social distancing in waiting areas. All staff will be wearing masks and protective clothing to help keep both them and you safe and people are asked to wear a face covering while they are in the centre.
- People will need to bring a face covering (unless they cannot wear one for a health or disability reason) and their booking reference number if the appointment is at a large vaccination centre or proof of identity and

occupation if they are a health or care worker. If they need a carer they can bring them with them on the day.

- Appointments will last up to 30 minutes. People will be asked some questions about their medical history and if they have any symptoms that would stop them from being able to have the vaccine.
- If their appointment is at one of the large vaccination centres, they will be asked for your booking reference numbers.
- People will then be given an injection of the vaccine into their upper arm.
- Depending on which vaccine people receive, they may be asked to wait for 15 minutes after having the vaccination. This is in the unlikely event that they have a serious allergic reaction to the vaccine. This is very rare and if it does happen, it usually happens within minutes. The team will be trained to deal with reactions and treat them immediately.
- Everyone is advised to wait 15 minutes before driving, whichever vaccine they have had.
- Everyone will be given a leaflet about what to expect after their vaccination to take home with them.
- People's second appointment will be between 3 and 12 weeks after their first vaccination.
- People still need to follow the guidance to stop the spread of COVID-19, even after they've been vaccinated. This is because although the vaccine should prevent people from becoming unwell from COVID-19, we don't know yet if it will stop them from infecting other people.

### **Who is being vaccinated at the moment?**

- Vaccinations have now been offered to all people in the nine priority cohorts – people in care homes, those over 50, people with a health condition that puts them at greater risk from COVID-19, unpaid carers and frontline health and care workers.
- Phase 2 (adults under 50) began on 13 April with cohort 10 (people aged 40-49). On 13 May, vaccinations for cohort 11 started, with people aged 38 and over able to book an appointment on the National Booking Service and being contacted by their GP practice. The age limit will continue to reduce and will be confirmed on the homepage of the National Booking Service. Health and care workers and people who receive carer's allowance and haven't been vaccinated are also able to book an appointment using this online service.
- The aim is to have offered first vaccinations to everyone over 18 by the end of July.

### 3. Information for conversations with local communities

This section provides more detailed information on the most common concerns currently coming from local communities and which people might need reassurance about.

#### 3.1 Safety

##### How do we know the vaccines are safe?

- They have been approved by an independent body (The Medicine & Health Regulatory Authority), which follows international standards of safety.
- They have gone through all the same clinical trials and safety checks that all other licensed medicines have to complete before they can be used.
- No vaccine will be approved – or even be tested in a clinical trial – if it hasn't first passed other safety checks. At every stage of a vaccine's development, safety is always being checked and side effects monitored.
- They have been tested on more than 20,000 people, including people from different ethnic backgrounds
- Millions of people have now had a COVID-19 vaccine and reports of serious side effects, such as allergic reactions or clotting problems, have been very rare. No long-term complications have been reported.

There are some helpful videos you can watch if you want to know more about this:

- Eg: <https://youtu.be/A2zgOsFjNZw>  
**Nurse Siphelile addresses concerns** about the safety of the vaccine, its side effects and how she's had to counter disinformation within her own family who've been worried about things they've seen online.



##### How were the vaccines developed so quickly?

There are three main reasons why the covid-19 vaccines were developed more quickly than usual:

1. A world-wide priority - Covid-19 has affected the whole world so developing a vaccine was a global priority in order to save lives and help us get back to our normal ways of living. Funding was made available very quickly and scientists across the world have worked together to develop the vaccines, which has meant they were able to complete years of work in months.
2. Volunteers - clinical trials can't take place if there aren't volunteers. Usually it takes a long time to find enough volunteers but for the COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials thousands of people across the world volunteered to take part very quickly.

3. Speeding up the admin process – in normal circumstances, the process of undertaking trials and getting approval can take several years due to all the administrative and bureaucratic processes. For COVID-19 research (including vaccine development), all the different bodies involved worked together which meant the vaccine could move through the processes required much quicker. Usually, the different phases of the clinical trials take place one after another but for the Covid-19 vaccine some of them ran at the same time to speed up the clinical process. Also, the experts responsible for approving the vaccine got information all the way through the trials so could ask questions along the way and request any extra information they needed, rather than waiting to review all the information at the end, which would take much longer.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at Public Health England, explains how the covid-19 vaccines were developed so quickly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lxp2mD6gZg>

### **Did the trials include people from different ethnic groups and ages? How do we know the vaccines are safe for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities?**

- Over 20,000 people from across the world took part in the vaccine trials.
- The trials demonstrated that the vaccines are consistently safe and effective across different ethnic groups.
- For the Pfizer trial, participants included 9.6% black/African, 26.1% Hispanic/Latino and 3.4% Asian.
- For the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine 10.1% of trial recipients were Black and 3.5% Asian.
- Full details are available in the Public Assessment Reports, which contain all the scientific information about the trials and information on trial participants. These can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-pfizer-biontech-vaccine-for-covid-19/summary-public-assessment-report-for-pfizerbiontech-covid-19-vaccine>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca/summary-of-the-public-assessment-report-for-astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-moderna/summary-of-the-public-assessment-report-for-covid-19-vaccine-moderna>

### **Videos of trial participants**

The following are short films of people who took part in the vaccine trials talking about their experience:

Rochelle's trial video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2PvFm\\_SLQ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2PvFm_SLQ4)

Satish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5WRZwaWSz8>

## **Do the vaccines make you ill?**

- You **can't** get Covid-19 from having the vaccine.
- As with flu, it is possible to have caught Covid-19 and not realise you have the symptoms until after your vaccination appointment but the vaccine can not give you the virus.
- Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects in some people. This does not mean that every person who has a vaccine will experience side effects, or that the side effects will be particularly bad or damaging.
- Most of these are mild and short term, and not everyone gets them. Very common side effects include:
  - having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection. This tends to be worst around 1-2 days after the vaccine
  - feeling tired
  - headache
  - general aches, or mild flu like symptoms
- These tend to happen in the first couple of days after the vaccination and last a few days.
- If you get any of these symptoms starting from around 4 days to 4 weeks after being vaccinated, you should call 111 immediately:
  - a severe headache that is not relieved with painkillers or is getting worse
  - a headache that feels worse when you lie down or bend over
  - a headache that's unusual for you and occurs with blurred vision, feeling or being sick, problems speaking, weakness, drowsiness or fits
  - a rash that looks like small bruises or bleeding under the skin
  - shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling or persistent stomach pain

## **How do we know there won't be side effects later on?**

- So far, millions of people have been given a COVID-19 vaccine, including people who took part in the trials many months ago, and reports of serious side effects, such as allergic reactions or clotting problems, have been very rare.

## **I'm worried that the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine might cause blood clots**

- The MHRA is monitoring reports of an extremely rare blood clotting problem affecting a very small number of people who have had the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.
- The problem can also happen in people who have not been vaccinated and it's not yet clear why it affects some people.
- The MHRA and JCVI have emphasised that the risk of this condition is extremely small and that the benefits of the vaccine outweigh the risks for the vast majority of people.
- If you have already had the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, you should your second dose, whatever your age, unless you suffered any serious side effects after your first vaccination.
- If you are aged 40 and over or have a health condition that puts you at higher risk from COVID-19, you should have Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine if it is



offered to you. The benefits in protecting you against the serious consequences of COVID-19 outweigh any risk of this very rare condition.

- If you are aged 18-39 and do not have a health condition that puts you at higher risk from COVID-19, you will be offered an alternative Covid-19 vaccine where this is available. This has been recommended as a precaution as people under 40 are at less risk from Covid-19 and given the position regarding supplies of the other vaccines. The national booking service will direct you to a centre that has the right vaccine for you.
- If you are under 40, you can still choose to have the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine if this will mean you can be protected more quickly.
- The following leaflet provides more information:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/977653/PHE\\_COVID-19\\_AZ\\_vaccination\\_guide.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/977653/PHE_COVID-19_AZ_vaccination_guide.pdf)
- Information from the Joint Committee for Vaccinations & Immunisations is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/jcvi-advises-on-covid-19-vaccine-for-people-aged-under-40>

### **Covid-19 vaccines and fertility**

- The Covid-19 vaccines do not affect fertility in women or men.
- There has been a lot of misinformation about the vaccines affecting fertility but medical experts agree that this is not possible.
- The vaccine components will leave the body within a few days and there is no evidence of these having any effect on fertility.
- The theory that immunity to the spike protein could lead to fertility problems is not supported by evidence. Most people who contract COVID-19 will develop antibodies to the spike and there is no evidence of fertility problems after COVID-19 disease.
- Dr Gayatri Amithalingam explains this in the following video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aF4Hk5C27KU&list=PLLDaQ3SAWJh14Eha8es7pUVU1rCU1E5yU&index=1>
- The vaccine was originally not recommended for women who were planning a pregnancy as this is standard practice for all new medicines until further data is available. However, having reviewed the latest evidence, the JCVI has updated its advice and says there is no need for women to delay pregnancy after having the vaccination.
- Doctors and midwives at the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists and the Royal College of Midwives issued a statement to reassure women that these claims are not supported by any evidence and that there is no scientific process by which the vaccines could affect women's fertility.  
[\*\*Information and advice for pregnant women about the COVID-19 vaccine\*\*](#)
- The British Fertility Society and Association of Reproductive and Clinical Scientists have also produced information to reassure patients undergoing fertility treatment.  
[https://www.arcscientists.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Covid19-Vaccines-FAQ-1\\_2-logos-1.pdf](https://www.arcscientists.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Covid19-Vaccines-FAQ-1_2-logos-1.pdf)

- Local fertility specialists are urging people who are trying to conceive to have their vaccination when it is offered. Dr Virginia Beckett, Clinical Lead for Reproductive Medicine at Bradford Teaching Hospitals has made a video explaining why: <https://twitter.com/bthft/status/1362028759822594050?s=24>

### **Pregnancy and breastfeeding**

- The Joint Committee for Vaccinations & Immunisations [has updated its guidance](#) and is now advising that pregnant women should be offered COVID-19 vaccines at the same time as people of the same age or risk group.
- They have said it is preferable for pregnant women to have the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccine where available. This is because these vaccines have been used most widely for pregnant women in other countries and no safety concerns have been identified. There is no evidence to suggest that other vaccines are unsafe for pregnant women but more research is needed.
- Pregnant women are advised to speak to a healthcare professional before they have the vaccination to discuss the benefits and risks.
- Public Health England and the NHS have produced a leaflet with more information for pregnant and breastfeeding women. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-women-of-childbearing-age-currently-pregnant-planning-a-pregnancy-or-breastfeeding](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-women-of-childbearing-age-currently-pregnant-planning-a-pregnancy-or-breastfeeding)
- The Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists and the Royal College of Midwives have also published advice and information for pregnant women on their website. [www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-womens-health/covid-19-vaccines-and-pregnancy/covid-19-vaccines-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding/](http://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-womens-health/covid-19-vaccines-and-pregnancy/covid-19-vaccines-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding/)  
[www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/guidelines/2021-02-24-combined-info-sheet-and-decision-aid.pdf](http://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/guidelines/2021-02-24-combined-info-sheet-and-decision-aid.pdf)
- The JCVI has recommended that the vaccines can be given to women who are breastfeeding as there are no known risks to them or their baby. This is in line with recommendations from the World Health Organisation.

### **Safety at the vaccine centres**

- People may understandably feel nervous about going to a vaccine centre when they have been staying at home and avoiding contact with other people.
- The place that people choose to have their vaccine will have strict measures in place to keep them safe from COVID-19.
- The vaccine services are all in centres where there is enough space to allow for social distancing in waiting areas and strict cleaning and disinfecting processes will be in place.
- All the staff will be wearing masks and protective clothing to help keep people safe and people will be asked to wear a face covering at the centre (unless they are medically exempt)

## 3.2 Concerns about what is in the vaccine

### Ingredients

- None of the vaccines contain any animal or egg products or foetal cells or products.
- There have been lots of rumours about this but the ingredients have to be published as part of the approval process so people can confirm for themselves that this is correct.
- Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-pfizer-biontech-vaccine-for-covid-19>
- Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca>
- Moderna vaccine: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-moderna>
- The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine contains a tiny amount of ethanol but this is true of lots of things – it doesn't contain any more than a banana or slice of bread does – and scholars have been clear that this is permissible.
- Leaders from Muslim, Hindu and Jewish faiths have all said that the vaccines are suitable for people of their religions and people shouldn't hesitate to get them.
- Muslim scholars have also been clear that injections don't invalidate the fast so you can still have your vaccination is during Ramadan.
- [In this video, GP Dr Amir Khan explains that the vaccines do not have any animal products in and are suitable for Muslims and Hindus](#)

### Information to help make an informed decision

We want to encourage everyone to have the vaccine to help protect them from the effects of Covid-19 and to save lives. Having the vaccine is a personal choice but we want to make sure people make their decision based on accurate information and facts. People may find the following sources of information helpful when deciding whether to have the vaccine.

#### Advice for people who follow the Muslim faith

- The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) produced the [Friday sermon \(khutbah\) text for mosques](#) which explains why Muslims should have the vaccine.
- The [British Islamic Medical Association \(BIMA\)](#) has recommended both the Pfizer BioNTech and Oxford AstraZeneca vaccines for the Muslim and has produced a variety of information on this which people may find helpful.

#### Advice for people who follow the Hindu faith

- [Neasden Temple has produced a video in Gujarati](#) to explain the facts about coronavirus, providing reassurance on the safety and efficacy of the vaccine.

#### Advice for followers of the Jewish faith

- The Conference of European Rabbis have released [position statements on the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine](#).

Advice for people who follow a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle

- [Vegetarian Society](#) – what you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine
- [Vegan Society](#) – response to COVID-19 vaccine

### **3.3 Conspiracy theories / misinformation**

- The vaccine will offer people vital protection against the effects of Covid-19 so it is very important that people are acting on accurate information before making a decision about whether to have it.
- There are a number of rumours and misinformation circulating about the vaccine, which can understandably make people worry about having it, so it is important for people to check the source of the information they have received, especially if it is on social media.
- The NHS website has lots of information on the vaccine as well as links to other trusted sources of information: [www.nhs.uk/CovidVaccine](http://www.nhs.uk/CovidVaccine)

## 4. Getting started

These are some suggestions for starting the conversations:

### Opening questions

#### 1. Do you know many people who have been invited for the vaccine yet?

- **If someone they know has had the vaccine:**  
That's great, it's so important that as many people as possible are vaccinated, it will help save lives and once the population has built up immunity we will start to see life return to normal.
- **If someone they know has refused the vaccine:**  
That's a shame, do you know why they didn't have it?
- **If they don't know anyone who has had the vaccine:**  
It's very early days, and the NHS are inviting the people who are at highest risk first. They'll be contacting people when it's your turn.

#### 2. What have you heard about the vaccine?

- An open question like this encourages people to share their thoughts/concerns
- We do not want to suggest areas that people may be concerned about or ask if they have heard about a particular rumour/myth
- **If people talk about conspiracy theories 'myths':**  
There are a lot of rumours going around about the vaccine, but it's important to stop and think about whether these things are true. Would you like me to tell you what I know about the vaccine, or where you can get more information?
- **If people talk about the vaccine being unsafe or untested:**  
Lots of local NHS staff members, including doctors, have had the vaccine themselves – can I tell you a bit more about why they think it's safe?

#### 3. We're encouraging people to have the vaccine when it's their turn, as it's our best hope of returning to our normal ways of life and helping to protect our loved ones and our communities.

**Do you have any concerns about getting the vaccine when it's your turn? Or is there anything you would like to know more about?**

## In a nutshell

You may find the following information helpful as a summary. It is from NHS England's guidance to GP practices for making follow-up calls to people who initially declined a vaccination and to help address the concerns they may have.

### **Intro**

- I understand completely – we know some people have concerns and need more information.
- I might be able to answer some of the questions you have, can I talk to you about it for a little while?

### **Safety**

- These vaccines have a really good safety record – we wouldn't be able to give them if they didn't.
- They were tested on thousands of people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds and with different health conditions before being approved, and have now been given to millions people like you in England alone.
- Some people do have side effects but in almost all cases these are mild and go away within a day or two.
- Most importantly, they can keep you safe from getting seriously ill if you get coronavirus – it's the best way we have of keeping you safe and getting back to being able to do the things you want to do.
- We're working really hard to make sure that it's as safe as possible when you come to a vaccination service too – all the staff will be wearing PPE, surfaces are being disinfected regularly and social distancing will be in place.
- **WHERE RELEVANT** – there is no evidence at all that the vaccine makes you infertile.

### **Ingredients**

- Neither vaccine has any ingredients from animals or humans.
- **WHERE RELEVANT** – the Oxford/AstraZeneca contains a tiny amount of ethanol but this is true of lots of things – they don't contain any more than a banana or slice of bread does – and scholars have been clear that this is permissible.
- Leaders from all the faiths have said that the vaccines are a good thing and people shouldn't hesitate to get them.
- **WHERE RELEVANT** – scholars have been clear that injections don't invalidate the fast so you don't need to worry if your second dose is during Ramadan.

### **Don't need it**

- There are thousands of people in hospital at the moment who probably thought that Covid wouldn't affect them much too – the average age of people in intensive care is 60 but people much younger have been seriously ill and died too.
- Just because you've had Covid doesn't mean you can't get it again, and the next time time it could affect you worse. The vaccine is the only way to get a high level of protection and keep yourself and others safe.

## 5. Other Frequently Asked Questions

### About the vaccines

#### **How effective are the COVID-19 vaccines?**

Both vaccines have been shown to be highly effective at stopping people from becoming seriously ill or dying from Covid-19.

Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective – some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but the symptoms should be a lot less severe.

Having the vaccine prevents you becoming seriously ill from Covid-19 but you may still be able to spread it to others so it is very important to keep following the guidance – in particular, wearing a mask, washing your hands and keeping two metres apart.

#### **Will the vaccines work with the new strains?**

There is no evidence so far that the new strains will be resistant to the vaccines we have, so we are continuing to vaccinate people as normal. Scientists are looking now in detail at the characteristics of the virus in relation to the vaccines. Viruses, such as the winter flu virus, often branch into different strains but these small variations rarely render vaccines ineffective.

#### **How long do the vaccines take to work?**

Protection starts around seven days after your first dose. To get the maximum amount of protection, people need to have their second dose. Full protection takes effect around a week or two after the second dose.

#### **How long will my vaccine be effective for?**

We expect these vaccines to work for at least a year – if not longer - but this will be constantly monitored.

#### **Which vaccine will I get?**

The UK is currently using the PfizerBioNTech, OxfordAstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines. We will have more doses of the OxfordAstraZeneca vaccines so expect this is the one most people will receive.

#### **Can people pick which vaccine they want?**

No. The healthcare professional vaccinating you will have to use the vaccine that is available at the time of your appointment.

#### **Is one vaccine better than the other?**

All the approved vaccines have been shown to be safe and highly effective. No trials have been carried out to compare the vaccines: the important thing is that they will both protect you from becoming seriously ill from COVID-19.

#### **Why do I need two vaccinations?**

The evidence from the clinical trials showed that people build up better protection against COVID-19 when the vaccine is given in two, smaller doses, with an interval between them. If you don't have your second dose there is no risk to you but you will not be as well protected as you could be.

### **Why was the timing for second doses changed?**

The [UK Chief Medical Officers agreed](#) a longer timeframe between first and second doses so that more people can get their first dose quickly, and because the evidence shows that one dose still offers a high level of protection. This decision will mean the maximum benefit for the most people in the shortest possible time and will help save lives. Getting both doses is still important so people should return for their second vaccination at the right time so they get the maximum amount of protection.

### **Can I have the vaccine if I'm pregnant?**

The Joint Committee for Vaccinations and Immunisations has updated its guidance and is now advising that pregnant women should be offered COVID-19 vaccines at the same time as people of the same age or risk group. They have said it is preferable for pregnant women to have the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccine where available because they've been more widely used during pregnancy in other countries and no safety concerns have been identified. There is no evidence to suggest that other vaccines are unsafe for pregnant women but more research is needed.

You should speak to a healthcare professional before you have the vaccination to discuss the benefits and risks with you. You should also read the COVID-19 leaflet for childbearing, pregnant or breastfeeding women

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-women-of-childbearing-age-currently-pregnant-planning-a-pregnancy-or-breastfeeding](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-women-of-childbearing-age-currently-pregnant-planning-a-pregnancy-or-breastfeeding)

### **Can I have the vaccine if I am breastfeeding?**

The Joint Committee for Vaccinations and Immunisations has recommended that the vaccines can be given to women who are breastfeeding as there are no known risks to them or their baby. This is in line with recommendations from the World Health Organisation.

### **Is it safe to try to get pregnant after having the vaccine?**

Yes. There is no need for women to delay pregnancy after having the vaccination.

### **Can I have the vaccine during Ramadan/does the vaccine invalidate fasting?**

The British Islamic Medical Association have issued specific advice urging Muslims observing Ramadan not to delay getting the vaccine, drawing on analysis from Islamic scholars which says that injections for non-nutritional purposes do not invalidate the fast

Further information is available here: <https://britishima.org/operation-vaccination/hub/statements/#FAST>

### **What if I have an allergic reaction?**

The vaccines are safe and effective for the vast majority of people – they have been tested on tens of thousands of people and assessed by experts.

Anyone with a history of a severe allergy to any of the ingredients should not have the vaccine. Everybody will be screened for potential allergic reactions before getting vaccinated. Serious allergic reactions are rare. If you do have a reaction to the vaccine, it usually happens in minutes. Staff giving the vaccine are trained to deal with allergic reactions and treat them immediately, and all centres will be equipped to care for people who need it – just like with any other vaccine.



## Eligibility and priority groups

### **I've been added to the Shielded Patients list, when will I get my vaccination?**

If you have received a letter to say you have been added to the Shielded Patients list, you should have already been contacted to book an appointment. If not you can book online using the National Booking Service or contact your GP.

### **I have a health condition which puts me at greater risk from Covid-19, when will I get my vaccination?**

If you have a health condition that puts you at increased risk from COVID-19, you should have already been contacted to book an appointment. If not, please contact your GP practice

### **Which conditions are included in cohort 6?**

The JCVI guidance recommends that people with the following conditions should be included in cohort 6:

- chronic respiratory disease, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cystic fibrosis and severe asthma
- chronic heart disease (and vascular disease)
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease
- chronic neurological disease including epilepsy
- Down's syndrome
- people with a learning disability
- diabetes
- solid organ, bone marrow and stem cell transplant recipients
- people with specific cancers
- immunosuppression due to disease or treatment
- asplenia and splenic dysfunction
- morbid obesity
- severe mental illness

If you have one of these conditions and meet the criteria for a vaccination, your GP should have contacted you to make an appointment.

### **I am an unpaid carer – am I eligible for a vaccination?**

People who are the main carer for an elderly or disabled person are eligible for a vaccination in cohort 6. If you receive Carer's Allowance, you will be able to book an appointment using the national booking service or if you are registered as a carer with your GP practice, they will contact you to offer you a vaccination.

If not, you can contact your local carers' support organisation or council and if you are eligible you will be added to the list for a vaccination. Details of which organisation to contact will be on your local clinical commissioning group's website.

### **If a household has a priority group member, such as a vulnerable person, will everyone living in that household be vaccinated together?**

No. The Joint Committee for Vaccinations & Immunisations (JCVI) recommendations do not include household members of clinically vulnerable people automatically – although in some cases family members may be eligible in their own right or as carers.

They have however recently updated their guidance to advise that people over 16 who are living with an adult who has a weakened immune systems, such as those with blood cancer, HIV or those on immunosuppressive treatment should be prioritised for the vaccine.

### **Why haven't I been offered an appointment when people younger than me / in a lower priority group have?**

All GP practices are following the national directives on inviting cohorts. However, practices will have different numbers of patients in each cohort so there will be some variance in when people from different practices are offered their vaccination. It is also important to remember that age is not the only eligibility criteria: vaccinations are being offered to people of all ages who are clinically extremely vulnerable or have a health condition that puts them at increased risk from Covid-19.

## **Getting your vaccination**

### **How will people be invited for a vaccination?**

The NHS will contact people when it is their turn. Most people will either be contacted by their GP practice or receive a letter or text from the NHS National Booking Service. Texts will be sent using the Government's secure Notify service and will show as being sent from 'NHSvaccine' with a link to the NHS.uk website.

People can also book an appointment directly through the National Booking Service on [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination) if they meet the current age threshold ([www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination](https://www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination)) or by calling 119. The homepage will tell you what the current age limit is and will be updated each time the age limit reduces.

We know lots of people are eager to get protected but we are asking people **not to contact the NHS** to get an appointment until they are invited to do so. The NHS is working hard to make sure those at greatest risk are offered the vaccine first and people will not be able to make an appointment until they have received their invitation.

The NHS will follow up with people that haven't booked their appointment, as a reminder.

### **Can you walk in to any of the services to get a vaccination?**

No – you can only get a vaccination if you have an appointment. People are being offered vaccinations in the order recommended by the JCVI and will be contacted when it is their turn to make an appointment, either by their GP practice or the national booking service.

Please do not turn up at any of the centres without an appointment: booking slots are carefully managed to allow for social distancing and the number of appointments is based on the supply available that day.

### **I'm housebound, how will I get my vaccination?**

Your GP practice will make arrangements for you to have your vaccination at home and contact you when it is your turn.

### **Can people get a vaccine without their NHS number or if they aren't registered with a GP?**

While the NHS can only contact people for whom we have GP records, people who don't have an NHS number or aren't registered with a GP will still be able to get vaccinated.

It does however help to be registered with a GP – as well as being invited for Covid-19 vaccinations, being registered also means you will be invited for other vaccinations and important health checks including for cancer or heart disease.

Details of how to register with a GP are available at: [www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery/](http://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery/)

### **How will I get my second vaccination?**

You will be given your second vaccination 11-12 weeks after your first one. If you had your first vaccination at your local GP centre, you will be contacted by your practice when it is time to have your second dose. People who booked their first vaccination through the national booking service will already have been booked a second appointment at the same centre. If you need to check when this is or make any changes you can do this online or by calling 119.

### **If a household has a priority group member, such as a vulnerable person, will everyone living in that household be vaccinated together?**

No. The Joint Committee for Vaccinations & Immunisations (JCVI) recommendations do not include household members of clinically vulnerable people automatically – although in some cases family members may be eligible in their own right or as carers.

### **Can I get a vaccine privately?**

No. Vaccinations are only available through the NHS and are free of charge. If anyone claims to be able to provide you with a vaccine for a fee, they are likely to be committing a crime and should be reported to the Police online or by calling 101.

Remember:

- The NHS will never ask you for your bank account or card details.
- The NHS will never ask you for your PIN or banking password.
- The NHS will never arrive unannounced at your home to administer the vaccine.
- The NHS will never ask you to prove your identity by sending copies of personal documents such as your passport, driving licence, bills or pay slips.

## **The NHS National Booking Service**

### **What are the operating hours of the telephone booking system?**

The telephone booking service will be open 16 hours a day (from 7am until 11pm), seven days a week. People will also be able to book online 24/7.

### **What should people do if they can't get through to the phone line straight away?**

At times, due to high demand, the phone line will get very busy, which may mean waiting on the line for a while or calling back later. People can alternatively book online. If you need help to do this please ask someone in your support bubble.

### **What information will I need to book?**

You will need to provide your name, date of birth, postcode and ideally your NHS number, which will be included on your booking letter. If you have lost your letter or don't have your NHS number, you may need to provide the name and postcode/postcode of the GP practice you are registered with – in this circumstance you should use the phone booking service.

### **Does the national booking service work for people who don't understand English well or are deaf?**

The phone line has interpreters and a BSL facility available on request to help you book your appointments.

### **What if I book an appointment through the NHS website or 119 and I need to rearrange it?**

If you need to rearrange an appointment that you booked through the NHS website, you can do this through the 'manage your appointments' section on the booking page. If you booked through 119, you can also ring to rearrange your appointment.

If you can't attend your appointment for any reason, please cancel or rearrange it so that the appointment slot can be given to someone else who needs it.

### **Can I still book if I previously had an appointment but didn't attend or cancel it?**

Yes. The service will allow anyone who is eligible and has not already had a vaccination to book an appointment.

### **I've received a letter but someone I live with who is the same age hasn't yet. Can we get vaccinated together?**

The NHS is inviting eligible people in a phased basis as supplies of the vaccine allow. If you have received a letter and live with someone who is also eligible but has not received a letter, it is likely that theirs will follow shortly. If you like you can wait and book at the same time.

### **How is the service ensuring people don't fraudulently book an appointment?**

People will be asked to provide details of their identity at the time of booking, when they arrive for their appointment and before they are vaccinated.

## **Other**

### **I'm currently ill with COVID-19, can I get the vaccine?**

If you have Covid-19 or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms you should not receive the COVID-19 vaccine until you have recovered. The guidance says this should be at least four weeks after the start of symptoms or from the date of a positive Covid-19 test.

### **Should people who have already had Covid or are suffering from 'Long Covid' get vaccinated?**

Yes, if they are in one of the priority groups identified by JCVI. Getting vaccinated is just as important for those who have already had Covid-19 as it is for those who haven't, including people who have mild residual symptoms. Where people are suffering significant ongoing complications from Covid they should discuss whether or not to have a vaccine now with a clinician.

**I have had my flu vaccine, do I need the COVID-19 vaccine as well?**

The flu vaccine does not protect you from COVID-19 so you need to have both.

**Do I need to leave a space between having the flu vaccine and having the Covid vaccine?**

It is not essential to leave time between the flu and COVID-19 vaccine but it is recommended that there should be a gap of a week. THE NHS always encourages anyone who is eligible for a flu jab to have it as soon as possible.

**Can I still attend my appointment during the national lockdown?**

Yes. Getting the COVID-19 vaccine, or any other vaccine, is an important medical appointment and so is within the rules wherever you live. Vaccinations will continue as normal in all areas through the national lockdown and beyond. If you have booked or are offered an appointment, please attend it.