

FAQs for patients

Getting your vaccine

Who will get a vaccine?

People will be offered vaccinations in line with recommendations from the independent JCVI. Across the country, care home staff, those aged 80 years of age and over, as well as NHS staff considered to be a risk will be offered vaccination in line with JCVI recommendations, and we are now rolling out vaccines in care homes.

How will patients be invited for a vaccination?

The NHS will contact people when it is their turn. For most people this will be in the form of a letter either from their GP or the national booking system; this will include all the information they need, including their NHS number. Some services are currently also phoning and texting patients to invite them for an appointment.

We know lots of people will be eager to get protected but we are asking people **not to contact the NHS** to get an appointment until they are contacted. 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.

How many doses of the vaccine will be required and when?

Both vaccines require two doses to give the maximum protection. The latest advice is that the second dose should be given up to 12 weeks after the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Why are second doses being postponed?

The [UK Chief Medical Officers have 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 allow us to get the maximum benefit for the most people in the shortest possible time and will help save lives. Getting both doses remains important so we would urge people to return for their second vaccination at the right time.

How effective are the COVID-19 vaccines? And how long do they take to work?

The MHRA has said both vaccines are highly effective, but to get full protection people need to come back for the second dose – this is really important.

To ensure as many people are vaccinated as quickly as possible, the Department for Health and Social Care now advises that the second dose of both the OxfordAstraZeneca and the Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine should be scheduled up to 12 weeks apart.

Protection starts around seven days after your first dose. Full protection kicks in around a week or two after the second dose, which is why it's also important that when you do get invited, you act on that and get yourself booked in as soon as possible. Even those who have received a vaccine still need to follow social distancing and other guidance.

Can I get a vaccine privately?

No. Vaccinations will only be available through the NHS for the moment. Anyone who claims to be able to provide you with a vaccine for a fee is likely to be committing a crime and should be reported to the Police online or by calling 112.

About the vaccines

How do the vaccines work?

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.

Do the vaccines include any parts from foetal or animal origin?

There is no material of foetal or animal origin in either vaccine. All ingredients are published in the healthcare information on the MHRA's website.

For the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine information is available here:

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

For the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine information is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca>

The British Islamic Medical Association has produced a helpful guide for the Muslim community which can be found at <https://britishima.org/pfizer-biontech-covid19-vaccine/>

Can the vaccine alter your genetic material?

There is no evidence to suggest that individual genetic material will undergo an alteration after receiving the vaccine

Will the vaccines work with the new strain?

There is no evidence so far that the new strain 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 will my vaccine be effective for?

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

Are the vaccines safe?

Yes. The NHS will not offer any Covid-19 vaccinations to the public until independent experts have signed off that it is safe to do so.

The MHRA, the official UK regulator, has said both vaccines are safe and highly effective, and we have full confidence in their expert judgement and processes.

As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process, and continued monitoring once it has been authorised and is being used in the wider population.

What is the evidence to show the vaccine is safe for BAME communities?

The trials demonstrated that the vaccines are consistently safe and effective across different ethnic groups. Full details are available in the Public Assessment Reports.

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.

Are there any known or anticipated side effects?

These are important details, which the MHRA always considers when assessing vaccines. For these vaccines, like lots of others, they have identified that some people might feel slightly unwell, but they report that no significant side effects have been observed in the tens of thousands of people involved in trials.

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

More information on possible side effects can be found at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/>

Are there any people who shouldn't have the vaccine?

People with history of a severe allergy to the ingredients of the vaccines should not be vaccinated.

The MHRA has updated its guidance to say that pregnant women and those who are breastfeeding can have the vaccine but should discuss it with a clinician to ensure that the benefits outweigh any potential risks. Similarly, advice for women planning a pregnancy has also been updated and there is no need for women to delay pregnancy after having the vaccination.

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

People currently unwell and experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should not receive the COVID-19 vaccine until they 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-19 get vaccinated?

Yes, if they are in a priority group identified by JCVI. The MHRA have looked at this and decided that getting vaccinated is just as important for those who have already had Covid-19 as it is for those who haven't.

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 as you are eligible for both vaccines you should have them both. It is not essential to leave time between the flu and Covid vaccines but it is recommended that there should be a gap of a week.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine protect me from flu?

No, the COVID-19 vaccine will not protect you against the flu. If you have been offered a flu vaccine, please try to have this as soon as possible to help protect you, your family and patients from flu this winter.