COVID-19 vaccine

for people with a weakened immune system

People who have a severely weakened immune system are being offered a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. This is to help improve any protection you may have built from previous vaccination or infection.

What is COVID-19 or coronavirus?

COVID-19 is a very infectious respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It can be very serious in people who have a weakened immune system. There is no cure for COVID-19 although some newly tested treatments do help to reduce the risk of complications.

Why am I being offered a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine?

If you have a weakened immune system due to a health condition or medical treatment and are aged six months and over, you may be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination if it has been at least three months since your last vaccination. This is to help improve any protection you may have built from previous vaccination or infection. It is possible that you may not have responded as well as other people. The booster doses may help to improve your immune response and give you better protection.

Your specialist can advise whether this applies to you. By having the vaccine you may reduce your chance of catching the COVID-19 infection.

And, if you do, the symptoms may be less severe and the illness shorter, than if you had not had booster doses.

People who need a booster dose are those who had a severely weakened immune system around the time they had their first 2 doses. This includes those who had or have:

- blood cancers (such as leukaemia or lymphoma)
- lowered immunity due to treatment (such as steroid medication, biological therapy, chemotherapy or radiotherapy)
- lowered immunity due to inherited disorders of the immune system
- an organ or bone marrow transplant
- diseases that affect the immune system such as poorly controlled HIV
- other diseases or treatments as advised by your specialist

When should I have a COVID-19 vaccine?

Most people with a weakened immune system will be under the care of a hospital specialist and/or known to their GP.

Your GP or specialist will advise you that you are eligible for vaccination, and you will be invited to attend during a seasonal campaign, for example during the spring booster campaign (between April and June) or the autumn booster campaign (between September and December).

You should have a booster dose three months after your last COVID-19 vaccination.

Side effects

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 to 2 days after the vaccine
- feeling tired
- headache
- general aches, or mild flu like symptoms

You can rest and take paracetamol (follow the dose advice in the packaging) to help make you feel better. Although feeling feverish is not uncommon for 2 to 3 days, a high temperature is unusual and may indicate you have COVID-19 or another infection.

Symptoms following vaccination normally last less than a week. If your symptoms seem to get worse or if you are concerned, you can speak to your doctor.

How to get the vaccination

You can book online or go to a walk-in clinic or some pharmacies for your third dose. To help the clinic check that you are eligible, please bring any letters from your GP or specialist or details of medication you are taking. You may also be invited for vaccination by your GP.

You can book online for your vaccination at: **https://covid-19.hscni.net/get-vaccinated/**

People who shouldn't have the booster vaccination

If you've had a very severe reaction to the previous dose of the vaccine, you should discuss this with your doctor.

If you have missed a vaccination

Even if you have previously never had a COVID-19 vaccine, you can still receive it during a booster campaign in spring or autumn.

If you have already received a booster during a previous campaign, you will become eligible again in either spring or autumn, whichever comes first.

Further information
www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine
and you can read *What to expect after your COVID-19 vaccination* here
pha.site/COVID19infomaterials

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