



COVID-19 vaccination

A guide to the programme



This leaflet explains about the COVID-19
vaccination programme and who is eligible.



Find out more at www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine

What is COVID-19 or Coronavirus?

COVID-19 is caused by a new coronavirus, known as SARS-CoV-2. It was first identified in late 2019. It is very infectious and can lead to severe respiratory disease.

Many people who are infected may not have any symptoms or only have mild symptoms. These commonly start with cough, fever, headache and loss of taste or smell.

Some people will feel very tired, have aching muscles, diarrhoea and vomiting, fever and confusion. A small number of people then go on to have severe disease which may require hospitalisation or admission to intensive care.

Overall fewer than 1 in 100 people who are infected will die from COVID-19, but in those over 75 years of age this rises to 1 in 10.

There is no cure for COVID-19 although some newly tested treatments do help to reduce the risk of complications.

About the types of vaccine

In Northern Ireland, several different types of COVID-19 vaccines will be used during 2021. The vaccines will only be approved on the basis of large studies of safety and effectiveness.

Over 30 million people in the UK have been vaccinated against COVID-19 and the vaccine has already prevented many cases and more than 6 thousand deaths from COVID-19.

Recently there have been reports of an extremely rare condition involving blood clots and unusual bleeding after vaccination with AstraZeneca (AZ). This is being carefully reviewed but the risk factors for this condition are not yet clear. Because of the high risk of complications and death from COVID-19, the Medicines Healthcare products and Regulatory Agency (MHRA), the World Health Organization and the European Medicines Agency have concluded that the balance is very much in favour of vaccination.

Who should have the COVID-19 vaccines?

Initially, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), an independent expert group, recommended that these vaccines were offered to those at highest risk of catching the infection and of suffering serious complications if they catch the infection.

This included older adults, frontline health and social care workers, care home residents and staff, and those with certain clinical conditions.

Am I at risk from COVID-19 infection?

Coronavirus can affect anyone. If you are an older adult and have a long-term health condition, you should have already been offered the vaccine.

Who is now eligible for the vaccination?

The vaccine is now being offered to people at lower risk from the complications of COVID-19. You are still at risk of catching the infection and passing it on to others.

For most younger people COVID-19 is usually a milder illness that rarely leads to complications. For a few people the symptoms may last for longer than the usual two to three weeks. The vaccination will help to protect you against COVID-19.

The vaccine will be offered to those under 50 years old in the following order:

- 40 - 49 years
- 30 - 39 years
- 18 years and over

The risk remains higher in older ages. For example the risk of dying from COVID-19 in someone aged 40 to 49 is 3 times higher than someone in the 30 to 39 year age group and 12 times higher than someone in the 20 to 29 year age group.

As the programme progresses, the JCVI will advise on the appropriate vaccine for each age group. The vaccine offered may depend on your age. Currently the JCVI has advised it is preferable for healthy people under 30 to have a vaccine other than AstraZeneca (AZ).

The time when it will be offered will be based on the availability of those vaccines. Anybody who was previously eligible for vaccination remains so and should make an appointment to start or complete their recommended course.

Pregnant women

The JCVI has now advised that pregnant women should be offered vaccination at the same time as the rest of the population, based on their age and clinical risk group.

The Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are the preferred vaccines for pregnant women of any age. There is now extensive experience of the use of the Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna vaccines in pregnancy in the USA with no safety concerns. Pregnant women who commenced vaccination with the AZ vaccine, however, are advised to complete with the same vaccine.

Who cannot have the vaccine?

The vaccines do not contain organisms that grow in the body, and so are safe for people with disorders of the immune system. These people may not respond so well to the vaccine. A very small number of people who are at risk of COVID-19 cannot have the vaccine – this includes some people who have severe allergies and people with certain blood disorders.

Who should wait to have the vaccine?

If you are currently unwell, self-isolating, waiting for a COVID-19 test or have had a positive COVID-19 test result in the last four weeks, you should delay vaccination until later.

Will the vaccine protect me?

The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering from COVID-19 disease. It may take a few weeks for your body to build up some protection from the vaccine. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective – some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but this should be less severe.

Will the vaccine have side effects?

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short-term, and not everyone gets them. Even if you do have side effects after the first dose, you still need to have the second dose. Although you should get good protection from the first dose, having the second dose should give you longer lasting protection against the virus.

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, aches and chills

You can rest and take the normal dose of paracetamol (follow the advice in the packaging) to help you feel better. Although feeling feverish with flu-like symptoms is not uncommon for two to three days, a high temperature* is unusual and may indicate you have COVID-19 or another infection. Side effects following vaccination normally last less than a week. If your symptoms seem to get worse or if you are concerned, call NHS 111.

*If you are on chemotherapy and have a high temperature, contact your local cancer care unit.

If you experience any of the following more than 4 days and within 28 days (4 weeks) after vaccination you should seek medical advice urgently from your GP or Emergency Department.

- a new, severe headache which is not helped by usual painkillers or is getting worse;
- an unusual headache which seems worse when lying down or bending over or may be accompanied by
 - blurred vision, nausea and vomiting
 - difficulty with your speech
 - weakness, drowsiness or seizures;
- new, unexplained pinprick bruising or bleeding;
- shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling;
- persistent abdominal pain.

If you have any of the above symptoms after your first vaccination, you should speak to your doctor or specialist before having the second dose.

If you do seek advice from a doctor or nurse please make sure you tell them about your vaccination (show them the vaccination card if possible) so that they can assess you properly. You can also report suspected side effects to vaccines and medicines through the Yellow Card scheme. See page 8.

If you are currently in the clinically extremely vulnerable group, please continue to follow the government guidance.

What can I do after I have had the COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 infection, and two doses will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill. We do not yet know how much it will reduce the chance of you catching and passing on the virus. So, it is important to continue to protect those around you.

Remember, to protect yourself and your family, friends and colleagues you MUST still follow any local restrictions and:

- practise social distancing
- wear a face covering
- wash your hands regularly
- open windows to let fresh air in
- follow the current guidance at www.nidirect.gov.uk/coronavirus



Can I catch COVID-19 from the vaccine?

You cannot catch COVID-19 from the vaccine but it is possible to have caught COVID-19 and not realise you have the symptoms until after your vaccination appointment.

The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in your normal sense of taste or smell

If you have the symptoms above, stay at home and arrange to have a test.

What do I do next?

After you have had the first dose you need to plan to attend your second appointment. You should have a record card and your next appointment should be between 3 and 12 weeks later.

Although the first dose will give you good protection, you need the second dose to get longer lasting protection.

What should I do if I am not well when it is my next appointment?

If you are unwell, it is better to wait until you have recovered to have your vaccine, but you should try to have it as soon as possible.

You should not attend a vaccine appointment if you are self-isolating, waiting for a COVID-19 test or within four weeks of having a positive COVID-19 test.

**Keep your card safe
and make sure you keep
your next appointment
to get your second dose.**

Don't forget your
COVID-19 vaccination



**Make sure you keep this record
card with you**

For more information on the
COVID-19 vaccination or what
to do after your vaccination, see
www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine



COVID-19 immunisation
Protect yourself



Please read the product information leaflet for more details on your vaccine, including possible side effects, by searching Coronavirus Yellow Card. You can also report suspected side effects on the same website or by downloading the Yellow Card app.



coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk

Remember

COVID-19 is spread through droplets expelled from the nose or mouth, particularly when speaking or coughing. It can also be picked up by touching your eyes, nose and mouth after contact with contaminated objects and surfaces.

You **MUST** still continue to follow any local restrictions and:

- practise social distancing
- wear a face covering
- wash your hands regularly
- open windows to let in fresh air
- follow the current guidance at www.nidirect.gov.uk/coronavirus

Vaccination, helping to protect those most vulnerable.

If you need more information on the COVID-19 vaccination please visit: www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine

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