COVID-19 vaccine

A simple guide

HSC Public Health Agency

Why should I get the vaccine?	The COVID-19 vaccines help to protect you and those around you. They teach your immune system how to protect against severe disease caused by COVID-19. The vaccines also produce much stronger immune responses compared to after COVID-19 infection alone. They are also much safer than contracting the virus.
How can I get the vaccine?	Everyone aged over 16 years is eligible for vaccination. Certain priority groups are also eligible for booster doses. Single vaccine doses are being offered to 12-15 year olds. This will principally be done through school vaccination visits in October and November. Consent forms will be sent home to parents. More information on eligibility and booking can be found at www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/get-covid-19-vaccination-northern-ireland
Which is the best vaccine?	All of the approved vaccines are effective and safe. There is no 'best' vaccine. For more information on the different vaccines see below resources.
Which vaccine will I get?	You will be offered one of the approved vaccines for your age range at your appointment.
Can I pick which one I get?	As above. Certain groups of people may also be preferentially offered specific vaccines based on their medical history.
How many injections will I need?	You need two (plus any boosters as clinically indicated) for best protection. Evidence indicates two doses are required for longer lasting protection.
Are there any side effects?	As with all medicines, side effects can occur after getting a vaccine. However, these are usually very minor and don't last long, such as a sore arm feeling tired, headache, aches and chills. For further information and reporting side effects see resources below.
Can I still spread the virus to others if I am vaccinated?	The vaccines reduce your likelihood of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19. However there is still a chance that you might get or spread it. It is therefore essential that we all continue to follow any public health advice and restrictions, even after vaccination.
I have a health condition. Is the vaccine safe for me?	There are very few people who cannot receive the vaccine. The vaccines currently available do not contain live virus, so are safe for people with problems with their immune system. Any person who has any questions about their eligibility for the vaccine, including previous allergies, should discuss with their GP or Clinician prior to their appointment.
What if I'm pregnant, planning to get pregnant or breast-feeding?	The vaccination is safe in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. There is absolutely no evidence, and no theoretical reason by which any of the vaccines could affect fertility in women or men. In line with the advice from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), Royal College of Midwives (RCM) and the JCVI, all pregnant and breast feeding women should be offered the COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines do not contain ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant women or to a developing baby. The COVID-19 vaccine protects you and your baby from COVID-19, which may be more severe during pregnancy. If you are planning a pregnancy, or are currently pregnant, you should get vaccinated.
Will other measures (social distancing/face coverings/self-isolation) still apply to me if I've had the vaccine?	Yes, you should still act to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the community and stick to the regulations as you may still be able to carry the virus. Anyone identified as a close contact should follow the relevant guidance on www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-self-isolating-and-close-contacts If you are identified as a close contact by Contact Tracing, and are fully vaccinated, you no longer need to self-isolate, but should book a PCR test.

For more information see:

PHA vaccine FAQS
www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/northern-ireland-covid-19-vaccination-programme/covid-19-vaccination-programme

Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Vaccine FAQs
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/

British Fertility Vaccine FAQs
www.britishfertilitysociety.org.uk/2021/07/27/bfs-arcs-covid-19-vaccines-fertility-2/

NI Direct close contact guidance
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-self-isolating-and-close-contacts

Department of Health statement on vaccine rollout in young persons
www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/young-people-aged-12-15-be-offered-covid-19-vaccine

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