



Coronavirus

COVID-19 vaccine FAQs



City of Westminster



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COVID-19 vaccine FAQs

1. What vaccines for COVID-19 are currently available?

In the UK, there are three types of COVID-19 vaccine that have been approved for use:

- Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine
- Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine
- Moderna vaccine

The COVID-19 vaccine is given as an injection into your upper arm. They all require two doses to provide the best protection. The latest evidence suggests the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine provides protection for up to 3 months for most people. As a result of this evidence, there has been a change to the length of time between the first and second dose of the vaccine. The second dose was previously given 21 days after having the first dose, but this has now changed to 3 months after.

2. How does the vaccine work?

The COVID-19 vaccine works by making a protein from the virus that is important for creating protection. The protein works in the same way it does for other vaccines by stimulating the immune system to make antibodies and cells to fight the infection.

3. Will the vaccine protect me?

The COVID-19 vaccine will reduce the chance of you suffering from COVID-19. Each vaccine has been tested in more than 20,000 people in several different countries and has been shown to be safe. It may take a week or two for your body to build up some protection from the first dose of vaccine. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective, so you should continue to take recommended precautions after vaccination to avoid infection. Some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but this should be less severe.

4. 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.

For more information on COVID-19 symptoms, visit the NHS website.

5. Can I give COVID-19 to anyone after I have had the vaccine?

The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19, and two doses will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill. It is not yet known whether it will stop you from catching and passing on the virus. So it is important to follow national and local guidance to protect those around you. To protect yourself and your family, friends and colleagues you still need to:

- practice social distancing
- wear a face mask
- wash your hands carefully and frequently
- follow the current Government guidance for your local area.



For the latest information from the Government on COVID-19, visit the GOV.UK website.

6. Are the vaccines safe?

Yes, the vaccines have been proven to be safe. The NHS will not offer any COVID-19 vaccinations to the public unless independent experts have declared that it is safe to do so. The MHRA, the official UK regulator, has said the three types of vaccine are safe and highly effective. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process, and monitoring continues after authorisation.

7. How were the vaccines developed so quickly?

Medicines including vaccines are highly regulated – and that is no different for the approved COVID-19 vaccines. There are a number of factors that made it possible to develop the vaccines relatively quickly compared to other medicines:

1. The different phases of the clinical trial overlapped instead of running one after each other which sped up the clinical process;
2. Experts at the MHRA reviewed data as each trial was being delivered as opposed to getting all information at the end of a trial;
3. Clinical trials managed to recruit people very quickly as a global effort meant thousands of people were willing to volunteer.

8. Who should have the COVID-19 vaccine?

The NHS is currently offering the COVID-19 vaccine to people most at risk from coronavirus. This includes those eligible for **Carer's Allowance**, older adults, frontline health and social care workers, care home residents and staff, and those with certain clinical conditions or at greater risk from COVID-19. When more vaccine becomes available, the vaccines will be offered to other people at risk as soon as possible.

For more information, read the COVID-19 vaccination: A guide for older adults.

Getting the COVID-19 vaccination

9. How do I get the COVID-19 vaccination?

If you are aged 56 or over, clinically extremely vulnerable or you are eligible for **Carer's Allowance**, an eligible frontline health worker or an eligible frontline social worker you can now book your COVID-19 vaccination appointment without needing an invitation letter by visiting the **NHS vaccination website** or calling NHS 119, free of charge.

Please book and attend your appointment. You can book your appointment at a vaccination centre or a community pharmacy. The COVID-19 vaccination sites are run by NHS professionals and have extra measures in place to keep you safe during your visit. If you would prefer to receive the vaccine at a GP surgery, please wait to be contacted.

If you are at moderate risk from coronavirus (clinically vulnerable) the NHS will get in touch with you directly when it is your turn to be vaccinated. It's important not to contact the NHS for a vaccination before then.

For information about vaccines, visit the NHS website.



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

If the person you live with is aged 56 or over or are eligible for **Carer's Allowance**, clinically extremely vulnerable or an eligible frontline health and social care worker, they can now book their COVID-19 vaccination appointment without needing an invitation letter by visiting the **NHS website** or calling NHS 119, free of charge.

You can book your appointment at a vaccination centre or a community pharmacy. The COVID-19 vaccination sites are run by NHS professionals and have extra measures in place to keep you safe during your visit. If you would prefer to receive the vaccine at a GP surgery, please wait to be contacted.

If you are at moderate risk from coronavirus (clinically vulnerable) the NHS will let you know when it's your turn to have the COVID-19 vaccination. Please attend your appointment when you are invited.

11. Does the booking service work for people who don't understand English well or are deaf?

The phone line will have interpreters and a British Sign Language facility is available on request to help you book your appointments.

12. I'm over 56 so can now get in touch with the NHS to get my vaccination, but does that mean I can turn up at vaccination services without an appointment?

No. You will still need to make an appointment in advance before going to any vaccination service. This is important because booking slots are carefully managed to allow for social distancing and the number of appointments is based on the supply available that day.

13. Do I need to know my NHS number to use the booking website/phone line?

No. It's easier if you do have your NHS number, but if you don't both the NHS booking website and phone line can still book appointments using other details, provided you are registered with a GP practice.

You can find your NHS number on the NHS App or on the **NHS website**.

14. If I've already had my first dose will I be able to book my second in this way?

No. You will only be able to book if NHS records show you have yet to have your first dose. If you have already had your first dose, please wait for the NHS to contact you about your second.

15. Will this approach also apply to the next priority groups when it is their turn to be vaccinated?

For the moment this only applies to people aged 56 and over or those eligible for **Carer's Allowance** and those who are clinically extremely vulnerable and eligible frontline health and social care workers.

If you are at moderate risk from coronavirus (clinically vulnerable) the NHS will let you know when it's your turn to have the COVID-19 vaccination. Please attend your appointment when you are invited.



When the time comes to start vaccinating other priority groups, this will be by invitation only so that the NHS can manage the supplies of vaccines available in the fairest possible way.

16. How do I get an NHS number?

You may already have an NHS number but just don't know it. If you don't know your NHS number, you can find out if you have one and what it is on the [NHS website](#).

If you don't have an NHS number this is likely to be because you are not registered with a GP. If this is the case, we would recommend speaking with your local practice about registering.

As well as getting access to COVID-19 vaccines, being registered with a GP also means you are invited to important health checks such as for cancer or heart disease, and can access care easier when you need it.

More information on registering with a GP is available on the [NHS website](#).

17. I've had my first COVID-19 vaccine, where can I find more information on what to expect next?

If you have already had your first dose and were due to have your second dose after Monday 4 January 2021, the NHS will contact you about when you'll have your second dose.

When you are contacted by the NHS for your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, please attend your appointment.

[You can find more information in the NHS COVID-19 vaccination: What to expect guide.](#)

18. Why is the NHS postponing second doses?

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 after two weeks – 89% for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and 74% for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

This decision will allow the NHS to get the maximum benefit for the most people in the shortest possible time and will help save lives.

When you are contacted by the NHS for your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, please attend your appointment.

19. During national lockdown, will vaccines still be provided/should I still attend my appointment?

Yes. Getting the COVID-19 vaccine, or any other vaccine, is an important medical appointment and vaccinations will continue as normal. If you have booked or are offered an appointment, please attend it. The place that you choose to have your vaccine will keep you safe from COVID-19 through a range of measures including cleaning and disinfecting and having social distancing in waiting areas. Please also wear a face covering to your appointment. You should also take the usual steps to minimise your risk as you travel to your appointment.



20. Is there a large vaccination centre in Westminster?

A large vaccination centre opened in Westminster at the start of March. The centre will be based at etc. venues Marble Arch, 86 Edgware Road, W2 2EA. The site will deliver thousands of jabs each week and offer an alternative to GP-led and hospital services that are already set up across north west London.

For more information about large vaccination centres, visit the NHS website.

21. What if I don't live close to one of the large vaccination centres?

The National Booking Service also handles booking for pharmacy-led vaccination services, of which there are around 200 across the country. Only a small number of people don't live within travelling distance of at least one of these services.

Alternatively, you can also choose to wait to be contacted by your local GP services. If they haven't been in contact already, this will be soon.

22. What if I can't get to the vaccination centre?

People who are housebound will be contacted by their GP services about alternative ways to get vaccinated. If you can't get to the vaccination centre, you can also wait until more locations closer to where you live become available. The NHS will follow up with those who haven't booked their appointment, as a reminder.

Age UK is offering a free taxi service for people aged 50 and above to get to and from their COVID-19 vaccination appointments until the end of March. The service uses Uber and the full cost of the travel to and from the vaccination centre will be covered.

If you are aged 50 or above and would like Age UK to arrange free taxi transport to and from your vaccination appointment, email ashallon@ageuk.org.uk or call **07947 188 221**.

23. I'm vulnerable – do I need to travel to get the vaccine?

The NHS is planning a mixed approach to ensuring that people who are eligible can get the vaccine safely. Community teams will take the vaccine to care home residents and those who can't leave home.

24. Has the MHRA approved care home jabs?

Yes, this has been approved and the NHS has been working to ensure it can safely transport the vaccine and deliver it to care homes. The roll out to care homes has now started and the NHS's ambition, if supplies allow, is to have offered vaccines to all residents, as part of the most vulnerable 13 million people, by the middle of February.

25. Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine privately?

No. COVID-19 vaccinations are currently only available through the NHS. Remember, the vaccine is free of charge. 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 101 service and/or Local Trading Standards.



26. Can I choose which vaccine I want?

No. The vaccines that the NHS uses and in what circumstances will be decided by the MHRA. Please rest assured that each of the vaccines have been approved because they pass the MHRA's tests on safety and efficacy.

27. Why have I not been contacted by anyone about a vaccination?

If you are 70 or over or on the Shielded Patient List, then it is likely that you have been contacted by the NHS already. If you haven't, this could be for a number of reasons, but is most likely to be because you are not registered with a GP or have recently moved, and the NHS therefore doesn't have your contact details.

If you have never registered with a GP or haven't been to a GP for a number of years, we would recommend speaking with your local practice about registering. As well as getting access to COVID-19 vaccines, being registered with a GP also means you are invited to important health checks such as for cancer or heart disease, and can access care easier when you need it.

More information on registering with a GP is available on the NHS website.

28. Will the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine be used more because it's cheaper and easier to store?

The vaccines are all classed as being very effective. The vaccines that the NHS uses and in what circumstances are decided by the MHRA. The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is easier to store and transport, meaning the NHS can deliver them in more places. The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is manufactured in the UK, so it is expected that more doses will be available to the NHS and that most people are likely to receive this vaccine over the coming weeks and months.

29. What about the Moderna vaccine? Why is this available in the USA but not here?

The MHRA has decided that the Moderna vaccines are safe and effective. The Moderna vaccine is not expected to be made available in the UK until spring 2021.

30. Does the NHS have the capacity and supplies available if lots of people now book?

The vast majority of people in these groups have already either had their first dose or are booked in to be vaccinated shortly. The NHS is confident that the supplies and booking slots are available to accommodate the expected number of people who may now come forward.

31. How is the NHS ensuring that the vaccine won't be wasted?

NHS plans are based around ensuring that waste is minimised. For example, this includes grouping vaccinations in one GP practice or high volume sites and ensuring that the numbers of people each site is able to see in one week is in line with the stock they receive.



32. 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.

33. Can I still book if I previously had an appointment but didn't attend or cancelled?

Yes. Only those who have had a vaccination recorded are marked on our system and are therefore unable to book again.

34. A letter came to my home but it was for someone else. Can I still use it to book an appointment?

No. Unless you are aged 56 or over or on the Shielded Patients List or an eligible frontline health or social care worker or are eligible for **Carer's Allowance** you will not be able to book an appointment. If you receive a letter for someone who does not live at your address anymore, please return to sender in the usual way so that our records can be updated.

35. What about people with uncertain immigration status? Can they receive the vaccine and is it safe?

Vaccines will be offered to every adult living in the UK free of charge by the NHS, regardless of immigration status. This will include anyone living in the UK without permission. Primary medical care is free of charge to all overseas visitors and so would not require any status checks to be carried out before accessing any medical care.

Anyone invited for a vaccine should never be denied one for not having a NHS number. While NHS numbers are important for the administrative process, they are not a pre-condition for being offered a vaccine. If you are registered with a GP, then they will contact you in due course. If you aren't registered, NHS Regional teams, working locally will reach out to unregistered people to ensure they are offered the vaccine.

COVID-19, side effects and ingredients

36. I've already had COVID-19. Should I get vaccinated?

Yes, you should get vaccinated if you are offered the COVID-19 vaccine by the NHS. The MHRA has decided that getting vaccinated is just as important for those who have already had COVID-19 as it is for those who haven't.

37. Do I need to leave a space between having the flu vaccine and having the COVID-19 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. There has never been a more important time to make sure you – and those you care for – are protected against serious illnesses such as the flu. If you haven't already received your flu jab and are eligible for the free vaccine, please contact your GP or pharmacist to book your appointment.



For more details, read our information on flu jabs.

38. Can the vaccine cause 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 symptoms after the first dose, you still need to have the second dose. Although you may get some protection from the first dose, having the second dose will give you long lasting protection against the virus.

For more information on common side effects, read the [NHS COVID-19 vaccination: A guide for older adults](#).

39. Will the vaccine work with the new strain of COVID-19?

There is no evidence currently that the new strain will be resistant to the current vaccines. Viruses, such as the winter flu virus, often branch into different strains, but these small variations rarely make vaccines ineffective.

40. What is the guidance on allergies?

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

41. What is the guidance for pregnant women and those who are breastfeeding?

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. Women of childbearing age, those who are pregnant or breastfeeding can also read the detailed information in this [NHS COVID-19 vaccination guide](#). Checking for allergies is a routine part of the process before giving any vaccine or new medicine. Checking for allergies and responding to any is a central part of training for vaccinators. These are new vaccines and so the NHS and the MHRA are being extra vigilant.

42. Where can I find information about the vaccine ingredients?

A detailed review of the vaccines and their ingredients have been provided by the MHRA and can be found at the following links:

[Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine information is available on the GOV.UK website.](#)

[Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine information is available on the GOV.UK website.](#)

[Moderna vaccine information is available on the GOV.UK website.](#)

The British Islamic Medical Association has also produced a helpful guide for the Muslim community which is [available on its website](#).



43. Does the vaccine include any parts from foetal or animal origin?

No. There is no material of foetal or animal origin in any of the vaccines. All ingredients are published in healthcare information on the MHRA's website and can be found at the following links:

Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine information is available on the GOV.UK website.

Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine information is available on the GOV.UK website.

Moderna vaccine information is available on the GOV.UK website.

44. Can the vaccine alter your genetic material?

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

45. Were the vaccines tested on high-risk groups?

For each of the vaccines, trial participants included a range of those from various ages, immune-compromised and those with underlying health conditions. Details of trial participants for the vaccines are published online:

Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine information is available on the GOV.UK website.

Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine information is available on the GOV.UK website.

Moderna vaccine information is available on the GOV.UK website.

More information

46. Where can I find more information about the COVID-19 vaccine?

For more information on the vaccination programme in North West London, visit the NWL London NHS website.



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