HM Government

NHS

Answering your questions about the Covid-19 vaccine

More and more people are now being invited to join the millions already vaccinated against Covid-19. Here you will find the answers to the most commonly asked questions.

EVERY VACCINATION GIVES US HOPE

How will I know it's my turn to have the Covid-19 vaccine?

The NHS will let you know when it's your turn to have the vaccine. Please only contact the NHS to arrange your vaccine appointment if you've been advised to do so. Once you have received a letter, email or text you can book your appointment online at your choice of vaccination site so that it's convenient for you. Those who can't access the online booking service can call 119 to book an appointment.

Is the Covid-19 vaccine safe?

Before any vaccine can be used, it must pass strict quality, safety and effectiveness tests and be granted approval by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). The Covid-19 vaccine is no different and has been approved by the MHRA.

Are there any side effects from the Covid-19 vaccine?

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short term, lasting no longer than a week, and not everyone gets them. These may include:

- A sore arm where the needle went in
- A headache
- Feeling achy
- Feeling or being sick
- Feeling tired

If required, paracetamol can help relieve some discomfort.

There have been reports of extremely rare cases of blood clots. The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is safe, effective and has already saved thousands of lives. The MHRA, and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) have both said that the benefits of the vaccine far outweigh the risks for the vast majority of adults.

The JCVI advises as a precaution that it's preferable for people under the age of 40 with no underlying health conditions to be offered an alternative vaccine where possible once they are eligible.

How can people be confident there won't be long-term side effects?

Every single vaccine authorised for use in the UK has been assessed for safety by the MHRA. Millions of people have already received the Covid-19 vaccine. The MHRA operates the Yellow Card scheme on behalf of the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM). The scheme collects and monitors information on suspected safety concerns and relies on voluntary reporting of suspected adverse incidents by healthcare professionals and members of the public (users, patients and healthcare professionals). You can find out more at **yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk**

Can I choose which Covid-19 vaccine I have?

No. All vaccines that are available will have been approved because they pass the MHRA's tests on safety and efficacy, so people should be assured that whichever vaccine they have, will be highly effective and protect them from coronavirus.

Can people with allergies have the Covid-19 vaccine?

You should not have the Covid-19 vaccine if you have ever had a serious allergic reaction (including anaphylaxis) to:

- a previous dose of the same vaccine
- any of the ingredients in the vaccine

Tell healthcare staff before you are vaccinated if you've ever had a serious allergic reaction. Serious allergic reactions are rare. If you do have a reaction to the vaccine, it usually happens in minutes. Staff giving the vaccine are trained to deal with allergic reactions and can treat them immediately.

Can pregnant or breastfeeding women have the Covid-19 vaccine?

If you're are pregnant, you should be offered the vaccine when you are eligible. Pregnant and breastfeeding women are offered the vaccine based on age and clinical risk group.

It's preferable for pregnant women to have the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccine because they have been more widely used during pregnancy in other countries and have not caused any safety issues.

You can have a Covid-19 vaccine if you are breastfeeding. There is no evidence that the vaccine has any effect on the chances of becoming pregnant and there is no need to avoid pregnancy after being vaccinated.

The vaccine can't give you or your baby Covid-19. Speak to a healthcare professional before you have the vaccine. They will discuss the benefits and risks with you.

Search 'pregnancy and coronavirus' on **nhs.uk** for more information.

Does the Covid-19 vaccine affect fertility?

There is no evidence that the vaccine affects fertility, or your chances of becoming pregnant. If you are concerned, please search 'A guide to Covid-19 vaccination – All women of childbearing age, those currently pregnant or breastfeeding' on **gov.uk** for more information.

How do I know the Covid-19 vaccine has been widely tested on people like me?

Each of the vaccines has been tested on tens of thousands of people across the world and over 30 million people have taken the vaccine in the UK. They're tested on both men and women, on people from different ethnic backgrounds, representative of the UK population and of all ages between 18–84.

Will the Covid-19 vaccine protect me?

Vaccines offer important protection to reduce risk, but they don't make you invincible. Protection from any vaccine takes time to build up. In general, the older you are the longer it takes. It will take at least two weeks in younger people and at least three weeks in older people before you can expect to have a good antibody response.

Can I catch coronavirus from the Covid-19 vaccine?

No, you can't. But it's possible to have caught the virus and not realise you have the symptoms until after your vaccination. If you have any of the symptoms of coronavirus, stay at home and arrange to have a test. If you need more information on coronavirus symptoms, check **nhs.uk**

How does the Covid-19 vaccine work?

Like any vaccine, the Covid-19 vaccine works by teaching your immune system how to create antibodies that protect you from disease. It's safer for your immune system to learn this through vaccination than by catching the disease.

Is the Covid-19 vaccine vegetarian?

The Covid-19 vaccines currently approved in the UK do not contain any components of animal origin and so, yes, they are vegetarian.

I'm young & low risk so the Covid-19 vaccine isn't for me

The average age of people in intensive care is 60, but people much younger have been seriously ill and died too, with thousands more still suffering the effects of Long Covid after what might have been a mild initial case. If we've learned anything from this last year, it's that nobody is really safe. Anyone can get Covid-19, including young people, and anyone can spread it. Getting vaccinated is one of the best things you can do to protect yourself and others around you from the virus, vaccines reduce infections, hospitalisations and deaths from Covid-19.

The Covid-19 vaccine contains alcohol & therefore are not permissible

The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine contains a tiny amount of ethanol. Less than what you would find in some of your daily groceries like bread. Faith Leaders and Muslim Scholars have said that the vaccine is not Haram.

How do I know if the Covid-19 vaccine is suitable for people of my faith?

The approved Covid-19 vaccines are suitable for people of all faiths. They don't contain any components of animal origin or foetal cells.

Will people under 40 be offered a vaccine other than Oxford/Astra Zeneca?

The (JCVI) advises that it's preferable for under-40s with no underlying conditions to be offered an alternative to the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine where available.

Everybody who has already had a first dose of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine should receive a second dose of the same brand, irrespective of age. The exception is a very small number of people who experienced blood clots with low platelet counts from their first vaccination.

If you are unsure, speak to a healthcare professional.

Why do I need a second vaccination?

Vaccines offer important protection to reduce risk, but they don't make you invincible. Protection from any vaccine takes time to build up. In general, the older you are the longer it takes.

It will take at least two weeks in younger people and at least three weeks in older people before you can expect to have a good antibody response. Even better protection then comes from the second dose, so it's really important that everyone gets their second vaccination. You will be contacted to arrange a date for your second appointment unless you have already booked via the national booking system.

For more information, visit **nhs.uk/covidvaccine**