

## What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine

**UPDATED 21 December 2020**

- The coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine is safe and effective. It will give you the best protection against coronavirus
- The vaccine is part of our defence – we need to continue with hands, face, space
- The NHS will let you know when it is your turn to have the vaccine. It is important not to contact the NHS for a vaccination before then.

### Who will get it when

- An independent group of experts has recommended that the NHS first offers vaccines to those at highest risk of catching the disease and of suffering serious complications or dying from COVID-19
- This includes older adults in care homes and frontline health and social care workers. When more vaccine becomes available, the vaccines will be offered to other people at risk as soon as possible
- The phased vaccination programme will see patients aged 80 and above who are already attending hospital as an outpatient, and those who are being discharged home after a hospital stay, among the first to receive the life-saving jab
- Care home providers are also being asked by the Department of Health and Social Care to begin booking staff into vaccination clinics. GPs are also expected to be able to begin vaccinating care home residents.
- Any appointments not used for these groups will be used for healthcare workers who are at highest risk of serious illness from COVID-19

### Where the jabs will be administered

- There were 50 hospital hubs in the first wave, with more hospitals starting to vaccinate over the coming weeks and months as the programme ramps up
- Hundreds of local vaccination services run by family doctors and their teams have opened across England, with more practices in more parts of the country joining in on a phased basis during December and in the coming months.

- Vaccination centres treating large numbers of patients in sporting venues and conference centres will subsequently stand up when further supplies of vaccine come on stream.

### Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine

- The life-saving vaccine is typically delivered by a simple injection in the shoulder but there is a complex logistical challenge to deliver from the manufacturers to patients. It needs to be stored at -70C before being thawed out and can only be moved four times within that cold chain ahead of use
- The COVID-19 vaccine does not contain any animal products or egg.
- In a position statement published on the 6 December, the British Islamic Medical Association recommend the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for eligible at-risks individuals in the Muslim community. Further information is available here <https://britishima.org/pfizer-biontech-covid19-vaccine/>.

### How safe is the vaccine?

- The vaccine approved for use in the UK was developed by Pfizer/BioNTech.
- It has met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness set out by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).
- Any coronavirus vaccine that is approved must go through all the clinical trials and safety checks all other licensed medicines go through. The UK has some of the highest safety standards in the world.
- Other vaccines are being developed. They will only be available on the NHS once they have been thoroughly tested to make sure they are safe and effective.
- During the trial thousands of people were given a COVID-19 vaccine and no serious side effects or complications were reported.
- As is common with new vaccines the MHRA have advised on a precautionary basis that people with a significant history of allergic reactions do not receive this vaccination after two people with a history of significant allergic reactions responded adversely on the first day of the national roll out. Both are recovering well
- You can read about the MHRA approval of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for COVID-19 on the GOV.UK website

## Where can I get my COVID-19 vaccination?

- Vaccines will be offered in a range of settings.
- Some vaccination teams will visit people to offer the vaccine, for example in care homes, other people may have to go to the nearest centre. Because some of the vaccine has to be stored in a very low temperature freezer, you may not be able to get the vaccine in your normal GP surgery.

## How will I know when I can get a vaccine?

- When it is the right time people will receive an invitation to come forward.
- For most people this will be a letter, either from their GP or the national NHS.
- This letter will include all the information you will need to book appointments, including your NHS number.
- Please do not contact the NHS to get an appointment until you get this letter.
- Information on the vaccine is available on the NHS.UK website.

## How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine?

- After having both doses of the vaccine most people will be protected against coronavirus.
- It takes a few weeks after getting the 2nd dose for it to work.
- There is a small chance you might still get coronavirus even if you have the vaccine.
- This means it is important to:
  - continue to follow social distancing guidance
  - if you can, wear something that covers your nose and mouth in places where it is hard to stay away from other people

## COVID-19 vaccine side effects

- Most side effects are mild and should not last longer than a week, such as:
  - a sore arm where the needle went in
  - feeling tired
  - a headache
  - feeling achy
- You can take painkillers, such as paracetamol, if you need to.
- If you have a high temperature you may have coronavirus or another infection.
- If your symptoms get worse or you are worried, call 111.

- It is very rare for anyone to have a serious reaction to the vaccine (anaphylaxis). If this does happen, it usually happens within minutes.
- Staff giving the vaccine are trained to deal with allergic reactions and treat them immediately.

### **What if the centre I am offered is not easy to get to?**

- Please try to attend the vaccination centre you are offered. If you cannot attend that centre you may have to wait to get the vaccine in a more convenient location.

### **Can I pay for a COVID-19 vaccine privately or at a pharmacy?**

- No, the COVID-19 vaccination is only available through the NHS to eligible groups and it is a free vaccination

### **Is it mandatory?**

- There are no plans for a COVID-19 vaccine to be compulsory.

### **Why do I have to wait?**

- The COVID-19 vaccines will become available as they are approved for use and as each batch is manufactured. So every dose is needed to protect those at highest risk.
- The NHS will let you know when it is your turn to have the vaccine.
- Some people who are housebound or live in a care home and who can't get to a local vaccination centre may have to wait for supply of the right type of vaccine. This is because only some vaccines can be transported to people's homes.

### **Advice if you are of childbearing age, pregnant or breastfeeding**

- You should wait to have the COVID-19 vaccine:
  - if you are pregnant – you should wait until you have had your baby
  - if you are breastfeeding – you should wait until you have stopped breastfeeding
  - If you are trying to get pregnant, you should wait for 2 months after having the 2nd dose before getting pregnant.
- There is no evidence it is unsafe if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. But more evidence is needed before you can be offered the vaccine.