

COVID vaccination- your questions answered

In response to phone calls we have been getting and advice, we have produced the guide below to hopefully help explain what you should and should not be doing. Unfortunately, the volume of information available can make things quite confusing. It can also be difficult to sort out the facts from the myths. We would welcome any feedback on the answers below and if things are still not as clear as they should be.

Unfortunately, we are seeing that many of our patients are not having the vaccine due to believing gossip and myths. This is a big problem especially as local cases of COVID are extremely high and COVID disproportionately affects people from minority ethnic backgrounds as well as areas of high population density and social deprivation.

Please take the time to read the information below and inform yourself properly before making any decision about whether to have the COVID vaccine or not.

Tell me more about the vaccine itself

What is the COVID vaccine?

There are currently 3 types of vaccine available in the UK but the two main ones you will hear about are:

- Pfizer
 - mRNA vaccine coding for SARS-CoV-2 spike protein
 - Requires 2 doses at least 21 days apart. Currently UK duration extended to 3 months
 - Given as injection into the upper arm/shoulder area (like a flu vaccine)

- Astra Zeneca (Oxford)
 - Adenovirus vector-based carrying spike protein genetic sequence into cells
 - Requires 2 doses at least 28 days apart. Currently UK duration extended to 3 months
 - Given as injection into the upper arm/shoulder area (like a flu vaccine)

Both vaccines can be thought of as non-live vaccines meaning that what is injected into you is not a live virus and there is no chance at all of you therefore getting COVID from the vaccine itself. The vaccine cannot replicate inside you.

I have had COVID, do I still need the vaccine?

The simple answer to this is YES. Even though you have had COVID, we don't know how much of an immune response it triggered for you and therefore we don't know if you have any natural immunity and how long that may last.

How safe is the vaccine?

There have been fears that the vaccines have been produced quickly and therefore rushed in some way meaning they have not been tested properly. This is simply not true. Whilst the vaccine has been produced very quickly that is because of the amount of resource globally that has gone into vaccine development. Everything to do with the COVID vaccine has been fast tracked to get it out to people as quickly as possible. This does not mean that corners have been cut.

No one has died from being given the COVID vaccine compared to all the thousands of deaths from COVID itself in the UK and the millions of deaths globally.

It is true that there is no longer term safety data on the vaccine. We must be careful though to say that a lack of data means that a problem exists. It does not. From what we know about the vaccine so far in terms of the patient trials and vaccine rollout, it is very safe. There have been no serious complications or deaths related to the COVID vaccine.

Some people on social media will spread false stories and claims about the vaccine so be careful what you read. In terms of safety, there may sometimes be a lack of data. That is absolutely not the same as saying that it is unsafe.

Our experience of similar large scale vaccination programmes such as measles, mumps and rubella in children as well as pneumococcal and flu in adults is that vaccination is safe. Vaccination does not increase deaths. Vaccination does not cause the disease it is aiming to prevent. Everything we vaccinate against is because we have no other effective treatment. The only way to protect is to not get the disease in the first instance.

What are the side effects?

The main side effects are very similar for both vaccines and include:

- Injection site pain (80% of people)
- Fatigue and tiredness (60% of people)
- Headache (50% of people)
- Mild fever, muscle aches and chills (20% of people)

The vaccine has been proven to be VERY safe. There are a number of rumour and false claims circulating especially on social media. To be clear, the VACCINE DOES NOT CAUSE THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:

- It does not cause Infertility or subfertility
- It will not shorten life expectancy should you later get COVID
- The vaccine itself does not give you COVID
- The vaccine does not contain eggs or any meat products
- The vaccine does not change or alter your DNA or anything about you

We strongly recommend people to be very careful what they read and where they read it. It is very easy for rumours and myths to spread quickly and easily through communities with no evidence behind them at all. More information on vaccine myths can be found [here](#).

I think I can't have the vaccine because of medical problems

Very few people cannot have the vaccine. The following groups we would advise to not have the vaccine:

- Currently ill and unwell
- Currently have a cough, or temperature or confirmed COVID
- History of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to multiple drugs or a previous vaccine.
- Currently pregnant or actively trying to get pregnant

If you have a drug allergy such as penicillin, the vaccine is safe for you to have. Similarly, you can have the vaccine if you have health problems such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes.

I am pregnant or thinking of getting pregnant, what do I do?

Pregnancy is a grey area at the moment as there is no data and evidence about the COVID vaccine effects in pregnant women. There is no reason to suggest that it would not be safe or cause any harm to the mother or unborn child, but whilst there is a lack of information, we would advise to not have the vaccine for the time being unless you have a high risk health condition, such as diabetes.

There is no advice to avoid pregnancy after having the COVID vaccine. More information about pregnancy and COVID vaccine can be found [here](#).

You can have the vaccine if you are breast-feeding.

How effective is the vaccine?

The vaccine is very effective. The studies for Pfizer show that it is 95% effective after 2 doses. After 1 dose, the vaccine is 90% effective after a period of 14 days. 2 doses are recommended however as we do not know how long this immunity will last for people. The second dose acts as a booster.

The vaccine was shown to reduce deaths and hospitalisation from getting severe COVID.

Tell me more about the COVID vaccine delivery and what will happen

Who is getting vaccinated and when will I get my vaccine?

It is important to emphasise that this is a national vaccine rollout. It is happening under the most pressure the healthcare system has experienced in many years. There is a battle to get the vaccine out to people as quickly and safely as possible. There is also a battle to make sure there is enough vaccine supply for everyone and particularly the most vulnerable people.

The vaccine is mainly being given in terms of age priority as COVID seems to cause more serious illness in older age groups. Although this clinical picture is changing, it is still safe to say that older age is a significant risk factor to being worse off should you get COVID. Therefore protecting older adults is a priority. A diagram is included at the end to show the vaccine priority.

You will be contacted when it is your turn to have the vaccine. There is no need to contact us. The speed at which you have the vaccine depends on government decisions and vaccine supply.

The vaccine is currently not being recommended for children.

Where will I get my vaccine? I am worried about going out to get the vaccine

In the same way that the vaccines have been through lots of tests and checks, so has the delivery of the vaccine. The vaccine will be given from dedicated local sites. You will be advised of your local site at the time of booking. All the sites are close by. This means that for now, we will not be administering the vaccine from the surgery itself. This is mainly because of transport of the vaccine and storage. We also want to make sure people are safe and secure when having the vaccine.

The vaccine sites are all fully staffed. There are GPs on call should there be any problems. One way systems are in operation. The sites are regularly inspected and cleaned. Everything has been done to keep the area as clean and safe for people as possible.

Full resuscitation and medical equipment is available in case of any emergency.

Can I choose which vaccine I get?

At present, there is no choice. Choice depends on supply and what is available. For the vast majority of people, they will be given the Pfizer vaccine as that is the one we have most stock of. Both vaccines are safe and effective. There is nothing at all to suggest that one vaccine is superior to the other and nothing to suggest that one vaccine is more dangerous than the other.

I am housebound or have poor mobility, what do I do?

Transport can be arranged to get you to and from the vaccination centres so please ask us if you feel that you need this. There is currently no vaccine available for people who are housebound although this is likely to change over the coming weeks we hope.

Tell me what happens after I have had my first vaccine dose

Once I have the vaccine, what do I need to do?

It is important to note that the vaccine does not give you immediate protection. The trials show that people started to develop immunity after about 10 days. Before 10 days, there are still high risks of developing COVID.

We do not know what the vaccine does in terms of COVID transmission so it may still be possible for people who have had the vaccine to carry COVID and pass it onto other people. For that reason, the wearing of masks and regular hand washing remains very important.

The vaccine is part of the COVID solution along with mask wearing, social distancing and handwashing. The vaccine is not the whole solution in itself.

When will I get my second dose?

At present, there is some debate regarding the best timing for the second dose. It may be that the second dose is given about 12 weeks after the first dose.

Why is the second dose delayed and which one will I get?

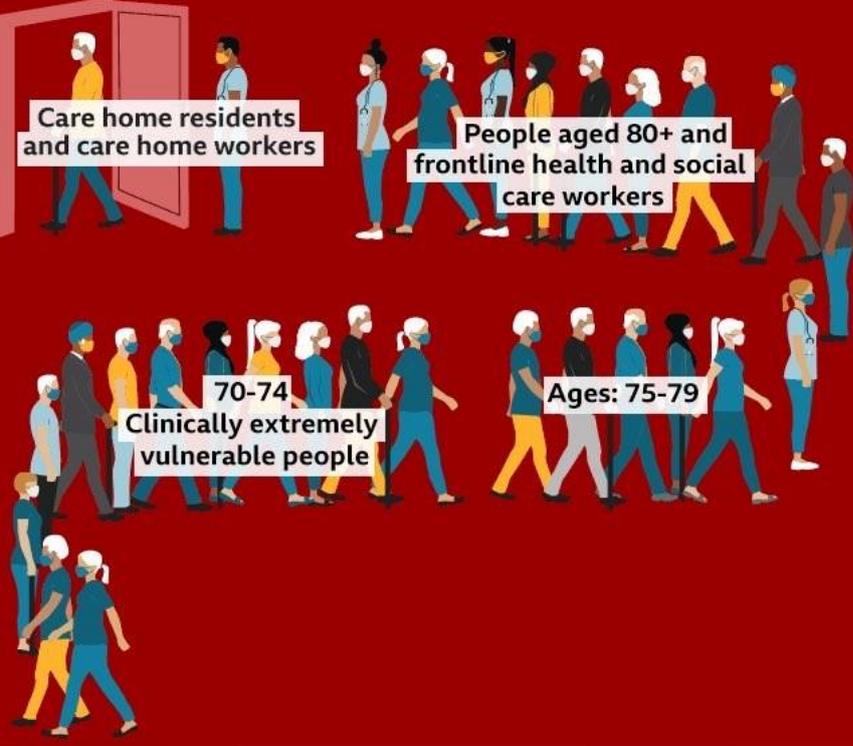
The delay in getting a second dose from 3 weeks to 12 weeks is because there is a need to try and vaccinate as many people as possible with one dose rather than two doses. The aim is to give everyone the same second dose vaccine as the first dose.

Stay safe.

The Springfield Medical Centre Team

Nine groups will get the vaccine first

Jan to Mid-Feb
Government target for
vaccinating top priority groups



End Feb onwards
remaining priority groups



Source: Government briefing, Department of Health