

COVID vaccination: Key messages and frequently asked questions

Background

Following extensive trials, 2 safe and effective vaccines for COVID-19 have been approved by regulators and are now available in Cornwall. These are called Pfizer/BioNTech and the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. They both give very high protection against severe COVID disease and both have good safety records.

Where are the local vaccination sites?

Vaccines are being delivered to residents from a variety of locations. These include hospitals, pharmacies and GP practices.

Who is being vaccinated?

There are national guidelines that tell us who to vaccinate and when. You can be vaccinated now if you:

- are aged 64 or over
- have previously received a letter saying you are at high risk from coronavirus (clinically extremely vulnerable)
- are an eligible frontline health or social care worker
- get carer's allowance or the carers component of universal credit

How can I get my vaccination?

If you are registered with a GP practice, they will invite you to an appointment.

How do I register with a GP?

You can register with a GP if you do not have one. GP practices do not turn people away if they lack proof of ID, address, or immigration status. You can register and receive the vaccine.

Is the NHS confident the vaccines are safe?

Yes. The NHS will not offer any COVID-19 vaccinations to the public until independent experts have signed off that it is safe to do so. As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), the official UK regulator, has said that both vaccines being used in Cornwall (Pfizer/BioNTech and the Oxford/AstraZeneca) have good safety profiles and offer a high level of protection, and we have full confidence in their expert judgement and processes. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process, and continued monitoring once it has been authorised and is being used in the wider population.

Can I get my vaccine from my own GP?

No, not necessarily. Not every GP practice is able to deliver the vaccine. GP

practices are working together to identify sites that could cover a group of GPs. The location, start date and frequency of the clinics are being rolled out in a phased manner. This roll out is being determined nationally.

How will I get the vaccine?

The local NHS is following the national guidance on who is priority to receive the vaccine and in what order.

When it is the right time people will be contacted to make their appointments. For most people they will receive a letter either from their GP or the national booking system: this will include all the information they need, including their NHS number. Some services are currently also phoning and texting patients to invite them in. Your support worker will be able to help you if you think you are eligible for a vaccine, but you are not registered with a GP.

Will the vaccine protect me?

The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering from COVID-19 disease. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective, and it may take a week or two for your body to build up some protection from the first dose of vaccine. Some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but this should lessen the severity of any infection.

Is it a single injection?

The vaccination is taken in 2 doses. The second dose will be required at around 12 weeks.

I have had my flu vaccine; do I need the COVID-19 vaccine as well and do I need to leave a gap between each vaccine?

The flu vaccine does not protect you from COVID-19.

It is not essential to leave time between the flu and COVID vaccine, but it is recommended that there should be a gap of a week.

We would always encourage anyone who is eligible but not yet taken up their flu jab to do so as soon as possible.

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. The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of any of the following: a new continuous cough, a high temperature, a loss of, or change in your normal sense of taste or smell. If you have the symptoms above, stay at home and arrange to have a test.

Can people choose what vaccine they want?

Any vaccines that the NHS will provide will have been approved because they pass the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's (MHRA) tests

on safety and efficacy, so people should be assured that whatever vaccine they get, it is worth their while.

After I have had the vaccine will I still need to follow all the infection control advice such as 'hands, face, space'?

Yes. The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 infection, and 2 doses will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill. No vaccine is completely effective, and it will take a few weeks for your body to build up protection. So, you will still need to follow the guidance in your workplace, including wearing the correct personal protection equipment and taking part in any screening and testing programmes. To continue to protect yourself, your residents, your family, friends and colleagues you should follow the general advice at work, at home and when you are out and about:

- practice social distancing
- wear a face mask
- wash your hands carefully and frequently
- follow the current guidance www.gov.uk/coronavirus

If I've had a positive test for COVID-19 should I still get vaccinated?

Yes, if you are in a priority group identified and have been invited for an appointment. The MHRA have looked at this and decided that getting vaccinated is just as important for those who have already had COVID-19 as it is for those who haven't. Getting the vaccine will provide you with further protection, but please arrange your vaccination appointment after you have completed your period of self-isolation.

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

Potentially, yes. The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 infection, and 2 doses will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill. We do not yet know whether it will stop you from catching and passing on the virus. So, it is important to follow the guidance in your local area to protect those around you. To protect yourself and your family, friends and colleagues you still need to:

- practise social distancing
- wear a face mask
- wash your hands carefully and frequently
- follow the current guidance: www.gov.uk/coronavirus

Does the vaccine contain any egg or gelatine?

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) can confirm that the COVID-19 Vaccines Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/ AstraZeneca do not contain any components of animal origin.

The British Islamic Medical Association have produced a helpful guide for the Muslim community which can be found at <https://britishima.org/pfizer-biontech-covid19-vaccine/>

Are the Pfizer and Oxford vaccines a live vaccine?

No, the vaccines are not a live vaccine. Having the vaccine will suppress the illness, but people could potentially still be infected by the virus or pass it on. Therefore, even if you have been vaccinated you need to continue to adhere to social distancing, wearing personal protective equipment and complying with the national Test and Trace.

Are there any side effects?

For these vaccines, like lots of others, it has been identified that some people might feel slightly unwell. All individuals will be provided with information on the vaccine they have received, how to look out for any side effects, and what to do if they do occur. Side effects may include a sore arm or feeling slightly hot, achy and feverish for 24-48 hours.

What about allergies?

These vaccines are safe and effective for the vast majority of people – they have been tested on tens of thousands of people and assessed by experts.

Any person with a history of immediate-onset anaphylaxis to the ingredients contained in the vaccines should not receive them. A second dose of the vaccine should not be given to those who have experienced anaphylaxis to the first dose of vaccination. Everybody will also be screened for potential allergic reactions before getting vaccinated. All vaccinators will have the training they need to deal with any rare cases of adverse reactions, and all venues will be equipped to care for people who need it – just like with any other vaccine.

Checking for allergies is a routine part of the process before giving any vaccine or new medicine. Having these conversations – as well as being able to deal with allergic reactions in the rare case they do happen, is a central part of training for vaccinators. But these are new vaccines and so the NHS and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) are being extra vigilant and responding quickly to ensure everyone across the NHS is totally clear on these requirements.

How effective are the vaccines? How long do they take to work?

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) have said both the Pfizer and Oxford vaccines are highly effective, but to get full protection people need to come back for the second dose – this is really important. Full protection occurs around a week or 2 after the second dose, which is why it's important to have both doses. However, even those who have received a vaccine still need to follow social distancing and other guidance.

What happens if a person has the first jab but not the second?

Both vaccines have been authorised on the basis of 2 doses because the evidence from the clinical trials shows that this gives the maximum level of protection.

To ensure as many people are vaccinated as quickly as possible, the Department for Health and Social Care now advise that the second dose of both the Oxford/AstraZeneca and the Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine should be scheduled up to 12 weeks apart.

The evidence doesn't show any risk to not having the second dose other than not being as protected as you otherwise would be. We would urge everyone to show up for both of their appointments for their own protection as well as to ensure we don't waste vaccines or the time of NHS staff.

Is it mandatory, and what happens if I don't want the jab?

It is not compulsory to have the COVID-19 vaccine. It is a person's choice whether they wish to have the vaccine or not. If you have any worries or are unsure about having the vaccine, then please speak to your support worker or GP who may be able to help.

How long will the appointment last?

The appointment will last approximately 10 minutes. This will include answering a couple of short questions about your health as well as having the vaccination itself. Depending on the vaccine that you have you will be asked to wait in a designated area for up to 15 minutes as a precautionary measure just to check you are fit and well after the vaccine and have no adverse effects from the vaccine.

Can I just turn up for an appointment?

At the moment there are no 'drop in' clinics. We know this may be helpful for people. If it would help you, please ask your support worker or GP to see if they can arrange it.

What will happen when I attend for my appointment and what do I need to bring?

Please wear a face mask and maintain social distancing during your appointment. Wear loose fitting clothing which will provide easy access to the upper arm.

What are the key messages that we can share?

The key messages to the public about when they will receive their vaccine are:

- The NHS is prioritising people who experts have agreed will benefit from the most
- Please don't call the NHS, we will call you
- When you are called, please attend your booked appointments
- Everyone working hard – amazing round the clock effort to get up and running
- More clinics are being made available all the time – everyone will receive the vaccine
- Hands, Face, Space remains key – even once people have been vaccinated

You can get more information about the COVID-19 Vaccination online at www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination.