

Covid-19 Vaccine FAQs

Issued 11.12.20

Q: How do vaccines work?

A: Vaccines greatly reduce the risk of infection by training the immune system to recognise and fight pathogens such as viruses or bacteria.

Q: Why do I need a Covid-19 vaccination?

A: The pandemic has cost the lives of 1.5 million people so far and has infected 65 million. While vaccination is not compulsory, vaccination is the best way of beating this virus and getting back to normality. The vaccines that are being developed and approved by MHRA are safe and fully recommended.

Q: How is the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine delivered?

A: It is given as an intramuscular injection into the arm (like the flu jab)

Q: Why are two doses needed?

A: The first dose primes the immune system to the virus and the second dose makes the immune response stronger. You will need to have both doses to be fully protected against Covid-19. There are a number of other vaccines that require a second dose or boosters (such as Hepatitis B vaccine).

Q: How quickly after the second dose can I be considered protected?

A: You can be considered protected seven days after the second dose.

Q: Will I need another booster every year like flu vaccine?

A: We don't know this yet and more work is being done to look into this and how long immunity lasts for.

Q: Will the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine provide lifelong protection against Covid-19?

A: We don't know this yet but it is likely to give protection for many months if not years.

Q: Why do I need to have had the flu vaccine first?

A: Vaccination is the best way to protect you, your family and your patients from flu. There must be at least seven days between receiving a flu vaccine and the Covid-19 vaccine. It's recommended you get your flu vaccine as soon as possible, so you can also be protected against Covid-19 as soon as you are offered that vaccine.

Q: Is the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine safe?

A: Yes. The UK Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency approved the vaccine on 2 December 2020. This agency has assessed all the data from clinical trials involving thousands of participants and has deemed the vaccine safe.

Q: What's the process of testing a vaccine and how have Covid-19 vaccines been developed so quickly?

A: Any new medications including vaccines are rigorously tested and trailed before being licenced for use. This process often takes many years and has different phases.

Due to the pandemic, finding a vaccine was the main focus of governments and the scientific community. This meant that funding and resources were rapidly available.

All of the critical phases / stages that must be included in drug testing were carried out. They were scheduled in a different way to make the process as efficient as possible without compromising safety.

Q: Have the vaccines been tested on enough people?

A: Yes. The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has been tested on more than 44,000 people. To put this in context, of 13 common vaccines approved between 2000-2011, the average number of participants was 27,000 (range 2,700-86,000) highlighting that the number of people it has been tested on is well within the expected number for a vaccine.

Q: How effective was the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine?

A: Pfizer/BioNTech evaluated 170 cases of Covid-19 in trial participants. Of these cases, 162 occurred in the placebo group and eight in the vaccine group. This means the vaccine is 95% effective.

Q: Is there anyone who can't have the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine?

A: There are very few people who can't have the vaccine. However, current guidance states that the following groups should not have the vaccine at present:

- Individuals participating in a clinical trial of COVID-19 vaccines
- Where an individual has a bleeding disorder AND their doctor recommends against IM or small dose injections on the balance of risk, which may include consideration of anticoagulation therapy status.
- Pregnant women, unless an underlying condition makes the individual at very high risk from COVID-19 and exposure cannot be avoided
- Breast-feeding mothers.
- Any person with a history of a significant allergic reaction to a vaccine, medicine or food (such as previous history of anaphylactoid reaction or those who have been advised to carry an adrenaline autoinjector).

Q: How long should I wait after the vaccine before planning a pregnancy?

A: It is advised that you should avoid pregnancy for two months after the second dose.

Q: What if I want to try for pregnancy before I'm vaccinated?

A: The advice for women is that you should not get vaccinated if you are pregnant or are planning a pregnancy within three months of the first dose.

Q: Will the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine affect my fertility?

A: There is no evidence that the vaccine has any impact on fertility.

Q: Will the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine stop me passing Covid-19 onto unvaccinated people?

A: We don't know this information yet.

Q: Will I get a certificate to prove I've been vaccinated?

A: We are awaiting guidance from the government about certification.

Q: I've already had confirmed Covid-19 infection. Do I still need to be vaccinated?

A: Yes. It is still unclear how long immunity lasts so vaccination is still recommended. It should be deferred until clinical recovery and at least four weeks after onset of symptoms or four weeks from the first PCR positive test result in those who have no symptoms.

Q: What if I have asymptomatic Covid-19 infection at the time of vaccination?

A: Vaccination of individuals who may be infected or asymptomatic or incubating COVID-19 infection is unlikely to have a detrimental effect on the illness.

Q: Will I still need to wear PPE after being vaccinated?

A: Yes, you will still need to adhere to all infection, prevention and control practices which remain the safest way to avoid spreading the virus – remember hands, face, space.

Q: If I am part of the asymptomatic testing programme, will having the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine cause me to have a positive test (on either the PCR or lateral flow testing kits)?

A: No. Vaccination itself will not cause a positive Covid-19 test result.

Q: What are the side effects of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine?

A: The side effects which you could experience with the vaccine are similar to those seen with other vaccines and can include a mild fever for the first 48hrs after vaccination (please note isolation is not required unless Covid-19 suspected).

Local reactions at the injection site are common and include pain, redness and swelling.

Other potential side effects include fatigue (4%) and headache (2%). They will usually resolve after a few days and medication such as paracetamol can be used if needed.

Q: Might there be long term side effects of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine we don't know about yet?

A: This is extremely unlikely. The way vaccines work mean that any side effects are usually experienced in the first few days and the data we have shows that is the case for this vaccine. The MHRA will be monitoring the situation closely.