

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Information for public-facing workers

Your job is important. The amount of contact you have with others could increase your potential to be exposed to the virus. Your health and safety is important to us, so we will support you to get the vaccination when it's offered to you.

People of any age can develop COVID-19 after exposure to the virus. Most people who get it will have a mild, short-lived illness, but many people do develop severe illness and need hospital care. COVID-19 has already caused over 100,000 deaths in this country. Vaccination will play a major part in preventing further deaths from COVID-19 and in helping us get back to a more normal life.

It is normal to have questions about any medicine, including vaccines. If you have not been vaccinated yet because you have concerns, you might find the information below helpful:

1. I'm not registered with a GP / don't have an NHS number...

If the vaccine is being offered to you, you should take it to protect yourself and others whether you are registered with a GP or not.

We would still encourage you to register with a GP. Anyone in England can register and see a GP for free. Your immigration status doesn't matter, and you don't need to have a fixed address. Just contact your local surgery to register with them (find your local GP practice here <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp>)

2. I'm worried that the vaccine will affect my fertility...

It is a responsible action to consider side effects such as this, especially if you are actively trying to get pregnant. There is no evidence that any of the vaccines being offered in the UK will affect fertility. Dr Edward Morris, President at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (doctors who specialise in pregnancy related issues), said: "We want to reassure women that there is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 vaccines will affect fertility. Claims of any effect of COVID-19 vaccination on fertility are speculative and not supported by any data".

When making your decision regarding the vaccine, you should also consider the potential implications of contracting COVID-19 whilst pregnant (which could happen if you don't get vaccinated). Some people become very unwell with it, which can have implications for unborn babies.

3. I'm breastfeeding and worried the vaccine could harm my baby...

Most breastfeeding mothers are careful about what they put into their bodies to make sure they don't harm their baby. You may have seen that there is no evidence that the vaccines are safe in pregnancy / whilst breastfeeding; this is because pregnant and breastfeeding women weren't included in the safety trials.

The experts agree however, that there is no known risk to breastfeeding mothers having the vaccine. Many other vaccines are offered to breastfeeding women. This view is supported by the Royal College of Midwives. If you have any concerns you should speak to your Health Visitor.

The Tommy's website has lots of helpful information: <https://www.tommys.org/pregnancyhub/blogs-stories/covid-19-vaccine-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding>

4. I've heard that the vaccine was developed using animal products – this goes against my beliefs...

The vaccines on offer in the UK do not contain any animal-derived products. There are no vaccines available that have not used animal testing as part of their development. Organisations such as the Vegan Society acknowledge that the vaccine is a fundamental part of saving lives.

For further details see <https://vegsoc.org/lifestyle/covid-19-vaccines/>

5. I have allergies (or anaphylaxis), so I shouldn't have the vaccine...

The current advice is that you can still have the vaccine unless:

- you have had a severe allergic reaction to any of the vaccine ingredients (links to this information are given at the end of this document) or
- you experienced anaphylaxis after your first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine

If you are not sure, speak to your GP. Allergies will be discussed before every vaccine given, just to be sure.

6. I'm worried about the safety of the vaccine...

Questioning safety is a common concern when taking any kind of medication, including vaccines.

The vaccines approved for use in the UK have 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 MHRA follows international standards of safety.

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. So far, millions of people have been given a COVID-19 vaccine and reports of serious side effects, such as allergic reactions, have been very rare. No long-term complications have been reported.

7. I think it was all done too quickly...

Because of the seriousness of this pandemic, scientists from around the world have worked together to rapidly develop vaccines. The vaccinations for COVID-19 have been able to move from development to use in the population very quickly when compared with how long medicine development usually takes. This is because finding a vaccine for COVID-19 was so important that lots of effort and resources were dedicated to the process. Work on the vaccine was prioritised, and therefore not caught up in any delays.

8. I'm wary of all vaccines...

Caution is understandable, and if you are feeling uncertain, then accessing the facts and good quality information will help (see the links at the end of the leaflet). Making sure that the information you are seeing / hearing is right is important as there is a lot of misinformation around.

Vaccines have been an important part of good public health for many years now. This is how we manage diseases such as Polio or TB; without mass vaccination, these diseases would continue to spread and kill many people. Many thousands of people in the UK receive vaccines every year with no negative effects.

The more people that are vaccinated against a specific disease, the better the control of that disease.

9. My family / friends abroad have had different information to what I'm being told...

It is not unusual for different countries to give slightly different advice. They will all advise on what is best for their populations. Also, different countries are using different vaccines, so if you are looking up information, make sure it is related to the vaccines on offer in the UK – these are currently:

- the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine
- the Oxford Astra-Zeneca vaccine.

The Moderna vaccine has now been approved in the UK and likely to be used soon.

10. I don't think there's much point with the new variants...

All viruses change (mutate) as they make copies of themselves to find a way to survive, so it is not unexpected that new variants are emerging.

The vaccines currently being used were developed around earlier variants of the virus, but that doesn't mean that they won't give any protection against new variants. New information is coming out regularly about the effectiveness with different variants.

Because this is all so new, scientists don't know yet exactly how effective the current vaccines are with different degrees of illness with the new variants.

Not having the vaccine means that you will have no protection against any of the variants.

11. I'm worried about getting a blood clot...

Some countries have suspended use of one of the vaccines (Oxford AstraZeneca) due to fears of blood clots. However, the World Health Organisation, the European Medicines Agency and the UK's drug regulators (MHRA) have all said that the benefits of the vaccine outweigh the risks.

More than 17 million people across Europe have had this vaccine, and the numbers of reported blood clots from this group are tiny – in fact there have been less cases than you would expect to see in the population, especially the older population who had the vaccine first.

Issues of blood clots are, however, common in people who contract Covid-19. Your risk of a blood clot would be far greater if you contracted Covid-19 than it is from having the vaccine.

12. I've heard I'll have to have a new injection every year...

We just don't know yet what the future will be for Covid-19 vaccines. Only time can tell how effective the first two doses are on new strains and for how long the protection will last. If we do need a yearly dose, this will be no different from the current flu vaccination programme.

We know that the current vaccinations significantly reduce the risk of severe illness and death in those who have the vaccine.

13. I had a bad experience with my first dose...

Most people had the common side-effects of a sore arm or headache – both of which could be treated successfully with paracetamol for those who are able to take it. It's unfortunate if you were one of the people who experienced worse side-effects from the first dose, as these were less common.

If you expect to feel the same after your second dose, you could try and be prepared by arranging it for a date when you don't have to do too much the next day and perhaps taking paracetamol after you've had your dose. For most people, the short-term side effects of vaccination are preferable to effects of contracting Covid-19.

If your poor experience was related to the environment rather than the vaccine, remember that you can book to have your second dose at a different place if you'd prefer. Just call 119 to re-arrange a different vaccination site.

14. Where can I get further information?

If you are looking for information yourself, always use reliable sources such as the NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/>

You can find out more about the individual vaccines, including their ingredients, in the links below. The information can be very technical, and if you need someone to explain it or answer your questions about the vaccines, you can ask your doctor (or other healthcare professional such as your midwife) or the healthcare professional who is offering you the vaccination.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/955901/Temporary_Authorisation_Patient_Information_BNT162_6_0_UK_clean.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/948335/Information_for_UK_recipients_COVID-19_Vaccine_AstraZeneca.pdf

Whatever your concerns about the vaccines, your GP surgery or other health professionals will be happy to have a chat with you to answer any questions.

Vaccinations are a key part of ending the pandemic.