

COVID-19 vaccination - Protection for health and social care staff

Why it is important to get a COVID-19 vaccination

If you are a frontline worker in health and social care, you are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 at work. Health and social care workers with direct patient and client contact are at much higher risk of repeated exposure to the infection.

COVID-19 can cause severe disease and may lead to long-term complications or death. These are more common in older individuals or those with underlying clinical risk conditions. You can have COVID-19 without any symptoms and pass it on to family, friends, patients and residents, many of whom may be at increased risk from coronavirus. Being healthy does not reduce your risk of catching COVID-19 or passing it on.

With high rates of COVID-19, it is important to protect staff against coronavirus, avoid pressure on the NHS and safeguard health and social care services.

Which vaccine will I get?

In the UK, there are two types of COVID-19 vaccine currently being offered first (made by Pfizer BioNTech and AstraZeneca). They both require two separate doses to provide the best longer-term protection.

Each vaccine was tested in over 20,000 people in several different countries and shown to be safe and effective. You will be given one of these vaccines depending on which one is available. These vaccines will not have a full UK marketing authorisation (license) yet but will have been authorised by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) based on a full assessment of their safety and effectiveness.

Will the vaccine protect me?

The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering from severe COVID-19 disease. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective. Studies have shown high levels of short-term protection from two to three weeks after a single dose of vaccine, but a second dose is required for longer-term protection. Some people may still get COVID-19 after vaccination, but this should be less severe.

The vaccines do not contain living organisms, and so are safe for people with disorders of the immune system. These individuals may not respond so well to the vaccine.

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Will the vaccine protect those I care for?

The evidence on whether COVID-19 vaccination reduces the chance of you passing on the virus is less clear at present. Most vaccines reduce the overall risk of infection, but some vaccinated people may get mild or asymptomatic infection and therefore be able to pass the virus on. It is possible that vaccinated health and social care staff will be less likely to pass COVID-19 infection to those they care for.

Will the vaccine have side effects?

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. These are usually mild and only last a few days, and not everyone gets them. Even if you do have symptoms after the first dose, you still need to have the second dose.

Very common side-effects include:

- having a painful heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm after the injection for several days after the vaccine

- feeling tired
- headache
- general aches, or mild flu-like symptoms

Although a mild fever is not uncommon for two to three days, a high temperature is unusual and may indicate you have COVID-19 or another infection. You can take the normal dose of paracetamol (follow the advice in the packaging) and rest to help you feel better. Do not exceed the normal dose. An uncommon side effect is swelling of the local glands.

These symptoms normally last less than a week. If your symptoms seem to get worse or if you are concerned, look at 111.wales.nhs.uk/ online, and if necessary call NHS 111 Wales or your GP surgery. If 111 is not available in your area, please call 0845 46 47. Calls to NHS 111 Wales are free, calls to 0845 46 47 cost 2p per minute (plus your telephone provider's usual charge).

If you do seek advice from a doctor or nurse, make sure you tell them about your vaccination (show them the vaccination card) so that they can assess you properly. You can report suspected side effects online at: coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/ or via the Yellow Card app.

Rarely, some people have an allergic reaction soon after a vaccination. This may be a rash or itching affecting part or all of the body. Even more rarely, some people can have a severe reaction soon after vaccination, which causes breathing difficulties and may cause them to collapse. This is called anaphylaxis and can happen with other medicines and food. These reactions are rare and nurses are trained to manage them. People who have an anaphylactic reaction can be successfully treated and usually recover within a few hours.

Who cannot have the vaccine?

A very small number of people who are at risk of COVID-19 cannot have the vaccine. You should not have the vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in the vaccine or to a previous dose of the same vaccine.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have ever had a severe allergic reaction, as an alternative vaccine may be available for you.

I am pregnant, can I have the vaccine?

The vaccines have not yet been tested in pregnancy, so until more information is available, those who are pregnant should not routinely have this vaccine. The Joint Committee on Immunisation and Vaccination (JCVI) has recognised that the potential benefits of vaccination are particularly important for some pregnant women. This includes those who are at high risk of catching the infection or suffering serious complications from COVID-19. In these circumstances, you should discuss vaccination with your doctor or nurse, and you may feel that it is better to go ahead and receive the vaccine.

If you are pregnant, you should not be vaccinated unless you are at high risk. You can be vaccinated after your pregnancy is over. If you have had the first dose and then become pregnant, you should delay the second dose until after the pregnancy is over, unless you are at high risk.

There is no advice to avoid pregnancy after COVID-19 vaccination.

I am breastfeeding, what should I do?

There are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in those breastfeeding or on the breastfed infant. Even so, COVID-19 vaccines are not thought to be a risk to the breastfeeding infant, and the benefits of breastfeeding are well known. Because of this, the

JCVI has advised that the vaccine can be given whilst breastfeeding. If you are breastfeeding, you may decide to wait until you have finished breastfeeding and then have the vaccination.

Can I go back to work after having my vaccine?

Yes, you should be able to work as long as you feel well. If your arm is particularly sore, you may find heavy lifting difficult. If you feel unwell or very tired, you should rest and avoid operating machinery or driving.

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 being vaccinated.

If you have any of the symptoms of COVID-19, stay at home and arrange to have a test. If you need more information on symptoms visit www.gov.wales/coronavirus

What should I do next?

You will receive information about when and where to get vaccinated. It is important to have both doses of the vaccine to give you the best longer-term protection.

Keep your vaccine card safe and make sure you take it to your next appointment to get your second dose.

What should I do if I am unwell on the appointment day?

If you are acutely unwell with a fever, call to cancel and wait until you have recovered to have the vaccine. You should not attend a vaccine appointment if you are self-isolating or waiting for a COVID-19 test or result.

After I have had the vaccine, will I still need to follow all the infection control advice?

The vaccine will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill. We do not yet know yet whether it will stop you from catching and passing on the virus. No vaccine is completely effective.

Therefore, you will still need to follow the guidance in your workplace, including wearing the correct personal protection equipment, taking part in any screening programmes and follow current advice and guidance.

I have had my flu vaccine, do I need the COVID-19 vaccine as well?

If you are eligible for both vaccines, you should have them both, but separated by at least a week if possible.

More information

- You can find out more information about COVID-19 vaccines, including their contents and possible side effects at [111.wales.nhs.uk/coronavirus\(2019ncov\)](http://111.wales.nhs.uk/coronavirus(2019ncov)) and www.gov.uk/government/collections/mhra-guidance-on-coronavirus-covid-19
- You can report suspected side effects online at: coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/ or via the Yellow Card app.
- To find out how the NHS uses your information, visit 111.wales.nhs.uk/lifestylewellbeing/yourinfoyourrights
- To order more copies of this leaflet visit <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/health-information-resources/>