

FAQs for patients

How will patients be invited for a vaccination?

When it is the right time people will receive an invitation to come forward. For most people this will be in the form of a letter either from their GP or the national booking system; this will include all the information they need, including their NHS number.

We know lots of people will be eager to get protected but we are asking people not to contact the NHS to get an appointment until they get their letter.

Is the NHS confident the vaccine is safe?

Yes. The NHS will not offer any Covid-19 vaccinations to the public until experts have signed off that it is safe to do so. The MHRA, the official UK regulator, have said this vaccine is very safe and highly effective, and we have full confidence in their expert judgement and processes.

As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. 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.

How long does the vaccine take to become effective?

The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of your suffering from COVID-19 disease. You may not be protected until at least seven days after your second dose of the vaccine.

Is the vaccine vegan/vegetarian friendly?

Yes, the Pfizer vaccine does not contain any meat derivatives or porcine products.

If, and when, further vaccines are approved we will publish information about known allergens or ingredients that are important for certain faiths, cultures and beliefs.

Who cannot have the vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccination is not recommended for women who are pregnant.

People who are suffering from a fever-type illness should also postpone having the vaccine until they have recovered.

How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine?

This is all included in the information published by the MHRA, and Public Health England will also be publishing more resources for patients and professionals. People can be assured the NHS will ensure that they have all the necessary information on those vaccines that are approved by the MHRA before they attend for their vaccination.

Is the NHS confident the vaccine will be safe?

Yes. The NHS would not offer any COVID-19 vaccinations to the public until it is safe to do so. The MHRA, the official UK regulator authorising licensed use of medicines and vaccines by healthcare professionals, has made this decision, and we have full confidence in their expert judgement and processes.

As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process.

What is the evidence to show the vaccine is safe for BAME communities?

The phase three study of the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine demonstrated a vaccine efficacy of 95%, with consistent efficacy across age, gender and ethnicity. Overall, among the participants who received the COVID-19 vaccine 82.1% were White, 9.6% were Black or African American, 26.1% were Hispanic/Latino, 4.3% were Asian and 0.7% were Native American/Alaskan.

I'm currently ill with COVID-19, can I get the vaccine?

People currently unwell and experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should not receive the COVID-19 vaccine until they have recovered.

Do people who have already had COVID-19 get vaccinated?

Yes, they should get vaccinated. There is no evidence of any safety concerns from vaccinating individuals with a past history of COVID-19 infection, or with detectable COVID-19 antibody, so people who have had COVID-19 disease (whether confirmed or suspected) can still receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it is their time to do so.

Are there any known or anticipated side effects?

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short-term, and not everyone gets them. Even if you do have symptoms after the first dose, you still need to have the second dose. You may not be protected until at least seven days after your second dose of the vaccine.

Very common side effects include:

- Having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection. This tends to be worst around 1-2 days after the vaccine
- Feeling tired
- Headache
- General aches, or mild flu like symptoms

As with all vaccines, appropriate treatment and care will be available in case of a rare anaphylactic event following administration.

How many doses of the vaccine will be required and when?

You are required to have two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, 21 days apart. You may not be protected until at least seven days after your second dose of vaccine.

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

The flu vaccine does not protect you from COVID-19. As you are eligible for both vaccines you should have them both, but normally separated by at least a week.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine protect me from flu?

No, the COVID-19 vaccine will not protect you against the flu. If you have been offered a flu vaccine, please try to have this as soon as possible to help protect you, your family and patients from flu this winter.