

26 January

COVID-19 Vaccine

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

Vaccines are the most effective way to prevent infectious diseases. Following extensive safety trials and authorisation by the independent regulator (the MHRA), effective COVID-19 vaccines are now available for free in the UK.

GPs in Oxfordshire have joined others GPs across the country as part of the largest vaccination programme in the history of the NHS.

Vaccines approved to date for use in the UK:

- Pfizer/BioNTech (Germany) vaccine: approved 2 December 2020
- Oxford University and AstraZeneca (UK) vaccine: approved 30 December 2020
- Moderna vaccine (US): approved 8 January 2021

Currently the UK is using the **Oxford-AstraZeneca and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines**.

It's given as 2 doses. You will have the 2nd dose 3 to 12 weeks after having the 1st dose.

Reasons to get vaccinated

Getting vaccinated is your biggest defence against the virus and will protect you, your family and those you care for

It's not just about protecting you. Many in our society have conditions preventing them from developing an effective immune response to vaccination, which makes them highly vulnerable to COVID-19.

We do not know the extent to which the COVID-19 vaccines will prevent individuals from being able to transmit the virus. However, since they protect individuals from disease, we can be reasonably sure they reduce the likelihood of disease transmission.

The COVID-19 vaccine should help reduce the rates of serious illness and save lives, it will therefore reduce pressure on the NHS and social care services.

Vaccine safety

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 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, thousands 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.

The vaccine cannot give you coronavirus.

Accessibility and availability

There will be enough Covid vaccines for everyone. These are being given free on the NHS.

Vaccine priority

Patients are being prioritised for the vaccine according to the national prioritisation criteria below. More information about the prioritisation criteria is [available here](#).

- Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
- All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
- All those 75 years of age and over
- All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
- All those 65 years of age and over
- All individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality
- All those 60 years of age and over
- All those 55 years of age and over
- All those 50 years of age and over

If you've not heard from your GP yet, please don't think you've been forgotten. Everyone will be offered a vaccine.

We understand lots of people are very eager to get protected but please don't contact your GP practices, the wider NHS or any of the community venues that are hosting clinics to seek a vaccine. Please be assured the NHS will contact you when it's your turn.

You might know others who have been invited for their vaccination already, but that doesn't mean that you are a lower priority or have been missed.

Many more people will be invited over the next few weeks. We are at the start of the biggest vaccination programme in NHS history and it will take time to work through everyone.

When it is the right time you will receive an invitation to come forward.

Where will I be vaccinated?

Groups of GP practices (known as Primary Care Networks) are working together to vaccinate patients. Your surgery will either ring, text or write to you offering an appointment.

So you might need to go to a different location for the vaccination itself. You will be told where to attend when you are invited.

You may also receive an NHS letter inviting you to book an appointment at one of the new mass vaccination sites. These letters have come from the national NHS computerised

system so you may have been offered the option of a site that is some distance from where you live.

You have the choice of going ahead and booking an appointment at one of these sites. Or alternatively, you can wait to be contacted by your own GP practice. They will be in touch as soon as an appointment slot is available at a vaccination site closer to your home.

Receiving your vaccine

- The vaccine is given as an injection into your upper arm.
- While the injection can be given very quickly, all patients must wait on site for 15 minutes afterwards to check they do not experience a severe reaction.
- Patients are also urged not to arrive too early, to avoid queuing outside for too long.

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.
- 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

Do the vaccines contain animal products?

No, none in any of the vaccines approved contain any components of animal origin.

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.

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 separated by at least seven days.

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.

Should I still go to my vaccination appointment in lockdown?

Leaving the house for medical reasons, including a Covid-19 vaccination appointment, is allowed in all local restriction Tiers. So if you are contacted by the NHS to book a vaccination appointment, it's crucial that you attend. Each service is carefully planned with strict safety measure in place.

If you're pregnant, breastfeeding or planning to get pregnant

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, think you may be pregnant, or are planning to have a baby, tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. There is limited data on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnant or breastfeeding women. Your doctor, pharmacist or nurse will discuss with you whether you can be given the vaccine.

Will the vaccine effect my fertility?

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. There is no biologically plausible mechanism by which current vaccines would cause any impact to fertility.

Likewise, there is no suggestion of any genetic mutations or outcomes.

Can the vaccine alter my DNA – myth

The fear that a vaccine will somehow change your DNA has been aired often on social media. This is totally false. The vaccine will enable your immune system to recognise and produce antibodies to fight the virus.

Microchip claims

Another conspiracy theory is a suggestion that the vaccine can change your DNA or that it will inject a microchip. Again this is totally false.

Once you've had your vaccine

Please remember that you must still adhere to the social distancing and hands, face space rules as this will go a long way to preventing the spread of the virus.