FIRST LIGHT
Healthcare

COVID-19 Vaccine Questions and Answers

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You can check when you will be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine by using the Vaccine Eligibility Checker covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility

To book go to flhealthcare.com.au/ballinavax or call 6685 6326

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Frequently asked questions

What is a COVID-19 vaccine?

A vaccine is a type of medicine that helps your body's immune system to fight infections. Vaccines are created in a way that prevent or reduce the severity of illness that may develop after an infection. Vaccines are not used to treat the infection once you have caught it.

How do the vaccines work?

After having a vaccine, your body creates antibodies to protect you from that infection. If you have the COVID-19 vaccine and are exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 in the future, your immune system will respond faster and better against the virus, to help protect you from disease.

Can I choose which COVID-19 vaccine I will receive?

No. The type of COVID-19 vaccine offered will depend on which priority group you are part of, your work or home location, the quantity of vaccine available, and the authorisation for use for each vaccine that is approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). **At present, it is recommended that people have two doses of the same COVID-19 vaccine to be adequately immunised.**

Are different vaccines better for different people?

Both the Pfizer/BioNTech and AstraZeneca vaccines offer strong levels of protection against severe COVID-19, regardless of people's individual backgrounds.

Who should not get the vaccine?

Currently, the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is **not approved for use in children** under the age of 16 and the Oxford/AstraZeneca in children under the age of 18 years. A very small number of other people cannot have the COVID-19 Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, including people who have had anaphylaxis (a type of serious allergic reaction) following a previous dose of vaccine; and people who have had anaphylaxis to an ingredient in the vaccine (this includes to polyethylene glycol, a very rare allergy.

How effective are the COVID-19 vaccines?

The COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia have been shown to be **extremely safe and effective at preventing people from getting COVID-19**. The vaccines are particularly effective in preventing people from becoming severely ill, needing hospitalisation and dying from the disease.

Do I need a referral from my doctor to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

No, except in the circumstance above.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine be free?

The vaccine will be free for all Australian citizens, permanent residents, and most visa-holders.

How is the vaccine given?

Like most vaccines, it will be injected into your upper arm muscle by a health professional who has been trained in giving the COVID-19 vaccine. Following your vaccine, you will be asked to wait at least 15 minutes to be sure you don't have any immediate reaction. To get the full benefit of the vaccine you will need a second injection at the recommended time some weeks after the first.

Does COVID-19 vaccine protect me immediately?

Around two to three weeks after you receive your first dose of the vaccine you should have some protection from COVID-19, but you need to have a second dose to have lasting protection.

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

All COVID-19 vaccines have gone through the required clinical trials, and through every part of this process they have **proven to be both safe and effective**. Before a COVID-19 vaccine is approved for use in Australia, it must pass the Therapeutic Goods Administration's (TGA) rigorous assessment and approval processes. This includes assessment of the vaccine's safety, quality and effectiveness.

Can I get sick with COVID-19 from the vaccine?

None of the vaccines currently provisionally approved or being reviewed for use in Australia contain a live virus that can cause COVID-19. This means that the COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19.

What are the potential side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

Clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines have reported **temporary side effects** typical of vaccines, such as pain or redness at the injection site, as well as mild to moderate fever, tiredness, headache, muscle aches and chills. These side effects may be more common after the second dose.

A small number of people may have more severe side effects—defined as side effects affecting a person's

ability to do their normal daily activities. These side effects usually only last a day or two after getting the vaccine. Monitoring of vaccine-related side effects will continue.

What are the long-term side effects of having the vaccine?

Most side effects are immediate and short term, such as a sore arm at the injection site.

There is no current evidence that suggests the vaccine will result in any long-term side effects.

Will the vaccine affect my fertility?

There is no evidence to suggest any vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccines, have any effect on male or female fertility.

What about if I am pregnant or planning to get pregnant – what are the implications for getting vaccinated?

Clinical trials for new medicines do not typically include pregnant or breastfeeding participants. Each country that is or has hosted clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccine candidates has different guidance regarding use of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy based on the benefits, risks and uncertainties in the context of the prevailing pandemic situation. **The Australian Department of Health has provided a COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy**. If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy, please discuss your individual circumstances with your doctor.

Why is a vaccine needed if we can do other things, like physical distancing and wearing masks, to prevent the virus that causes COVID-19 from spreading?

Currently there is no treatment available against COVID-19. Public health measures have focused on containing the spread of the disease through physical distancing measures, early case detection, isolation of cases and contacts and increasing health system capacity. Immunisation is likely to be an additional measure to help in preventing the disease and protecting the community against COVID-19.

How were these vaccines developed so quickly?

In response to the global epidemic of COVID-19, there has been unprecedented funding and collaboration between regulators, governments, vaccine developers and scientists to develop COVID-19 vaccines. Although COVID-19 vaccine trials have been set up much more quickly than would have previously been possible, this does not mean that safety assessment has been compromised. In fact, most of the vaccines being developed have now included tens of thousands of people in their trials, totalling nearly one quarter of a million people being involved in trials altogether.

What is herd immunity, and will the COVID-19 vaccines achieve this?

Herd immunity occurs when enough people have developed sufficient immunity to prevent the disease easily being transmitted from one person to another. Even before herd immunity is achieved, most of the population may be able to be protected from developing symptoms from COVID-19 if the vaccine is sufficiently protective against disease, and enough people in the population are vaccinated. Protection from disease is not the same as protection from infection, or prevention of transmission. Achieving herd immunity against COVID-19 is a long-term goal. We may need to wait for a vaccine that is able to be given to children, pregnant women, and people with some medical conditions, for sufficient coverage in the Australian population for herd immunity to be achieved. We also need to carefully monitor the COVID-19 virus to see whether any of the variants of concern are able to escape from the protection that the COVID-19 vaccines provide.

Will the COVID-19 vaccines be effective on new variants of the virus?

Clinical trials, so far, are showing that the COVID-19 vaccines induce antibodies that are likely to be able to respond to most minor changes in the virus' gene sequence. Australia will continue to closely monitor international developments regarding the COVID-19 variants of concern and will continue to perform careful genetic examination of the virus found in local cases.

Does the natural immunity after getting COVID-19 last longer than protection from COVID-19 vaccines?

The protection someone gains from having an infection (called 'natural immunity') varies depending on the disease, and it varies from person to person. Because this virus is new, we don't know how long natural immunity might last. Current evidence suggests that getting the virus again (reinfection) is uncommon in the 90 days after the first infection with the virus that causes COVID-19. We won't know how long immunity lasts after vaccination until we have more data on how well COVID-19 vaccines work in real-world conditions. Experts are working to learn more about both natural immunity and vaccine-induced immunity.

If I have already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine when it's available?

Due to the risk of re-infection with COVID-19, it is recommended that individuals should be vaccinated regardless of whether they have already had COVID-19 in order to reduce the risk to yourself and the community. Current advice is that people who have previously had COVID-19 or been infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus without symptoms can receive the vaccine as long as the person is not acutely ill and does not have any specific medical reason why they should not get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine be mandatory in Australia?

The COVID-19 vaccine will be voluntary, universal and free. If people choose not to have a COVID-19 vaccine, this will not affect their family's eligibility for Family Tax Benefit Part A or childcare fee assistance which only includes National Immunisation Program vaccines for those aged younger than 20. It is possible that in future, vaccination against COVID-19 might become a requirement for travel to certain destinations or for people working in certain high-risk workplaces. If this becomes the case, there will be exemptions in place for people who are unable to be vaccinated.

What should I do if I have concerns about the vaccine before I get vaccinated?

If you have questions or concerns about COVID-19 vaccination, you should review the information on the Australian Government website. If you still have concerns and you have been offered an appointment for COVID-19 vaccination, you should contact your GP prior to your appointment to discuss your concerns.

Do I still need to get the vaccine even if most people are already getting vaccinated?

We need as many people as possible who are able to receive the vaccine to be vaccinated, to stop or slow the spread of infection in the community. This reduces the chance of infection for everyone, and protects people who can't be vaccinated.

Where will my vaccination be registered?

All vaccinations, including the date of vaccination, will be recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register. Vaccination records will be available through MyGov and My Health Record, and the Australian Government is working to enhance existing digital and non-digital options. Additionally, the NSW Health systems will allow NSW Health to identify staff who are due their second dose of the vaccine.

Who gets my personal details for the COVID vaccine and how will this information be used?

Information collected as part of the COVID-19 vaccination consent process will be subject to the same use and disclosure rules as other health information collected by the NSW Public Health System. Your personal and health information may be used and disclosed for purposes connected with the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine program, including sharing your information with the Australian Government and for surveillance, assessment and monitoring of the COVID-19 vaccine or vaccination program. Your personal information held in NSW Health's database such as name, phone number and email address may be used to contact you following your vaccination for monitoring purposes. You may receive an SMS message or an email in the days following your vaccination and further direct follow up by NSW Health staff. If you are being offered

vaccination on the basis of the type of work that you do, your employer may be contacted about your vaccination dates so that they can appropriately schedule staff at the workplace.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine also protect me against the flu?

The COVID-19 vaccine will not protect you against influenza (flu). Follow the guidance of your GP or heath professional about when is best to schedule each dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (two doses in total) and the flu vaccine.

Do I need to get both the influenza vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine?

As always, everyone in NSW will be encouraged to also have their flu vaccination once the latest seasonal flu vaccine is available.

Is there anything I can do while I wait for my turn?

It is important to continue to protect yourself and others against COVID-19. Even when the vaccine starts to become available to the general community in NSW, **it will still be important to practise COVID safe behaviour**. While you wait to be vaccinated for COVID-19, there are some things you can do to get ready.

Make sure your details are up to date with Medicare. You can do this using either your:

- Medicare online account through myGov
- the Express Plus Medicare app
- calling the Medicare program.

If you don't have your account set up, you can:

- enrol in Medicare, if you're not already enrolled
- set up your Medicare online account if you're enrolled in Medicare, but don't have Medicare linked to myGov
- get an Individual Health Identifier (IHI), if you're not eligible for Medicare.

Once you've had your vaccine, you'll be able to get an immunisation history statement to prove your vaccination status. You can get proof of vaccinations from your Medicare immunisation history through myGov, or by calling Medicare on 1800 653 809.

Credit: NSW Department of Health

To book go to flhealthcare.com.au/ballinavax or call 6685 6326