**COVID 19 Frequently Asked Questions for Care Settings Staff**

**Why are vaccines important?**

Vaccination is the most important thing we can do to protect ourselves and our children against ill-health. They prevent up to 3 million deaths worldwide every year. Since vaccines were introduced in the UK, diseases like smallpox, polio and tetanus that used to kill or disable millions of people are either gone or seen very rarely. Other diseases like measles and diphtheria have been reduced by up to 99.9% since their vaccines were introduced. However, if people stop having vaccines, it's possible for infectious diseases to quickly spread again.

**Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

There are currently very high rates of COVID-19 transmission across the UK. As a frontline worker, you are at increased personal risk of exposure to infection with COVID-19 and of transmitting that infection to susceptible and vulnerable patients in health and social care settings. With high rates of COVID-19 it’s more important than ever to help stop the spread of Coronavirus. The [Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbyoccupationenglandandwales/deathsregisteredbetween9marchand25may2020#deaths-involving-covid-19-among-men-and-women-health-and-social-care-workers) tell us that there is greater COVID-19 mortality and morbidity in men and women working in social care than in non-social care staff of the same age and sex.

For every 20 vaccines delivered to care home staff and residents it is estimated that you will have helped to save one life. Overall fewer than 1 in 100 people who are infected will die from COVID-19, but in those over 75 years of age this rises to 1 in 10.

Vaccines are the way out of this pandemic. They save millions of lives worldwide and are safer now than ever before. Any vaccine must first go through a rigorous testing and development process and be shown to meet strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness, before it can be given to the public. It is strongly recommended that all frontline social care workers who can receive a vaccine choose to take it. Getting vaccinated will help protect yourselves and the people you care for from becoming seriously ill from COVID-19, so you can continue to be there for their family, friends and the people you care for.

**I’m worried that the vaccines aren’t safe.**

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 must go through all the clinical trials and safety checks all other licensed medicines go through. The vaccine has been shown to be effective and no safety concerns were seen in studies of more than 20,000 people. No long-term complications have been reported.

**Will the vaccine protect me?**

The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering from COVID-19 disease. It may take a week or two for your body to build up some protection from the first dose of vaccine. The vaccine has been shown to be effective and no safety concerns were seen in studies of more than 20,000 people. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective – some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but this should be less severe.

**Do I need two doses?**

It is important to have both doses of the vaccine to give you maximum protection. While the first dose acts as an important immune response primer, the second dose is needed to boost your body’s immune response to the COVID-19 virus providing the best protection for you. The latest advice is that the second dose should be given up to 12 weeks after the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Protection starts around seven days after your first dose. Full protection kicks in around a week or two after the second dose, which is why it’s also important that when you do get invited, you act on that and get yourself booked in as soon as possible.

**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. 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 highly likely that any infection in a vaccinated person will be less severe and that viral shedding will be shortened. We therefore expect that once vaccinated, you will be less likely to pass infection to your friends, family and to the people that you care for.

**What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Like all medicines, COVID-19 vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short-term, and not everyone gets them. Common side effects include a painful arm, feeling tired, headache, general aches and mild flu-like symptoms. However, these symptoms are normal and are a sign that your body is building immunity. These symptoms normally last less than a week. Further details can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-what-to-expect-after-vaccination).

**Can the COVID-19 vaccine give you COVID-19?**

The vaccine does not contain a live virus so you cannot catch COVID-19 from the vaccine. However, it is possible to have caught COVID-19 and not realise you have the symptoms until after your vaccination appointment. Although a mild fever can occur within a day or two of vaccination, if you have any other COVID-19 symptoms (new continuous cough, high temperature, a loss of/change to sense of taste or smell), or your fever lasts longer, stay at home and arrange to have a test. You should continue to follow guidance on wearing PPE, handwashing using soap and water or hand sanitizer, as well as other protective measures.

**What’s the difference between the three vaccines?**

* The first vaccine to be judged safe for use in the UK was the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. This needs to be transported in dry ice and must be stored at around -70 °C. Once delivered it can then be kept in a fridge for 5 days. The Government has bought 40 million doses of this vaccine.
* The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine was first administered in the UK on 4th January 2021. This vaccine needs to be stored at between 2-8°C and protected from light. The Government has bought 100 million doses of this vaccine.
* The Moderna vaccine was approved for use in the UK on 8th January 2021. It lasts for up to 30 days in household fridges, at room temperate for up to 12 hours, and can be stored in most household freezers for up to six months. The Government has bought 17 million doses of this vaccine. The Moderna vaccine should become available in the UK in Spring 2021.

**Which vaccine is best?**

All three of the available vaccines are very effective. Comparisons between the vaccine efficacies are unhelpful due to the different methodologies used, meaning it’s not as simple as saying one vaccine is better than the other. An effective vaccine will save lives and reduce the number of people who need to be admitted to hospital. Comparing vaccines on a simple percentage of effectiveness is too simple. A vaccine with slightly lower headline efficacy than another may prove to be the one that offers more durable protection or a greater effect on transmission. Approved vaccines have passed the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA’s) tests on safety and efficacy, so people should be assured that whatever vaccine they get will be highly effective and protect them from getting seriously ill from COVID 19.

**Can I refuse a particular vaccine?**

Not currently. All vaccines given by the NHS have been approved by the MHRA, so people should be assured that they are safe and effective. All three of the vaccines available offer more protection than not receiving a vaccine. The NHS has no say over which vaccine they are given to administer.

**My appointment for my second vaccine was cancelled, why do I have to wait?**

The UK Chief Medical Officers have agreed a longer timeframe between first and second doses so that more people can get their first dose quickly, and because the evidence shows that one dose still offers a high level of protection after two weeks – 89% for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and 74% for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. This decision will allow us to get the maximum benefit for the most people in the shortest possible time and will help save lives. Getting both doses remains important so we would urge people to return for it at the right time.

**After I’ve had the vaccine will I still need to follow all of the infection prevention and control advice?**

Yes. No vaccine is 100% effective, and it will take a few weeks for your body to build up protection. While the approved vaccines provide protection to a vaccinated person from becoming seriously ill from COVID-19, we do not yet know if they prevent someone from passing on the virus to others.

All staff will still need to follow the guidance in your workplace, including wearing the correct personal protection equipment and taking part in any screening programmes. To continue to protect yourself, your residents, your family, friends and colleagues you should follow the general advice at work, at home and when you are out and about:

• practise social distancing

• wear a face mask

• wash your hands carefully and frequently

• follow the [current guidance](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

**What does the vaccine actually contain?**

The COVID-19 vaccines that are currently approved for use in the UK do not contain the live virus which causes COVID-19. There is no latex or preservatives in the vaccine. Having the vaccine will not cause you to test positive using the approved viral testing methods.

* A full list of ingredients for the qualitative and quantitative composition of the vaccine can be found at point 2 in the [Information for Healthcare Professionals of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca/information-for-healthcare-professionals-on-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca).
* A full list of ingredients for the excipient composition of the vaccine can be found at point 6.1 in the [Information for Healthcare Professionals of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca/information-for-healthcare-professionals-on-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca).
* A full list of ingredients for the qualitative and quantitative composition of the vaccine and a full list of the excipient composition of the vaccine can be found at point 6 in the [Information for Recipients of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca/information-for-uk-recipients-on-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca).

**I am a vegetarian, can I have the COVID-19 vaccine?**

The MHRA has confirmed that the COVID-19 vaccines do not contain any components of animal origin, including pork, gelatine and eggs.

**I’m Muslim, can I have the vaccine?**

The British Islamic Medical Association recommend that the COVID-19 vaccines that are currently available in the UK for eligible individuals in Muslim communities. Further information from the British Islamic Medical Association can be found [here](https://britishima.org/operation-vaccination/hub/statements/#VAX).

**Will the COVID-19 vaccine alter my DNA?**

No, this is not possible. The messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) from a COVID-19 vaccine can be described as instructions for how to make a protein, and cannot alter or modify a person’s genetic makeup (DNA). mRNA never enter the nucleus of the cell where our DNA is kept, which means that it does not affect or interact with our DNA.

**What if I have allergies, should I get the vaccine?**

Having allergic reactions should not deter you from having the vaccine, especially if they have seasonal allergies. However, the MHRA have advised on a precautionary basis that people with a significant history of allergic reactions do not receive the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. The good news is that people who receive the vaccine are being monitored before leaving their appointment and can access to medical care should they experience reactions.

**If I’ve already had COVID-19, why do I still need to have the vaccine?**

If you have a confirmed case of COVID -19 you should wait at least 4 weeks after you had symptoms, or 4 weeks since your positive test if you didn’t have any symptoms, and until you have recovered from your COVID -19 infection, before having the vaccine. You may not have developed enough of an immune response to protect you against a subsequent COVID-19 infection. It is also unknown how long any immunity may last. [A recent study](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/past-covid-19-infection-provides-some-immunity-but-people-may-still-carry-and-transmit-virus) demonstrated that naturally acquired immunity as a result of past infections provides some immunity, but this immunity is a lower level and for a shorter time than if they have been vaccinated.

**I’ve had the flu vaccine, why do I need the COVID-19 vaccine?**

The flu vaccine does not protect you from COVID-19. If you are eligible for both vaccines, you should have them both, and they can now be given at the same time if the health professional deems it suitable to do so.

Flu jabs and COVID jabs should not routinely be given at the same time – there should usually be a gap of at least 7 days between them (as referenced in the Green Book). The guidance does permit clinicians to give both jabs at the same time if they consider this to be clinically appropriate and in the best interests of the individual.

**What if I’m not well when it’s my vaccination appointment?**

If you are unwell, it is better to wait until recovered to have your vaccine, but you should try to have it as soon as possible. You should not attend a vaccine appointment if you are self-isolating, waiting for a COVID-19 test due to symptoms or unsure if you are fit and well.

**Why haven’t I been invited for a vaccination yet?**

The [Joint Community on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020) has advised that the first priorities for any COVID-19 vaccination programme should be to minimise COVID-19 deaths and the protection of health and social care systems and staff. Current evidence strongly indicates that the single greatest risk of death from Covid-19 is increasing age and that the risk increases exponentially with age. The current priority list is as follows:

1. Residents in a care home for older adults **AND** Staff working in care homes for older adults
2. All those 80 years of age and over **AND** Frontline Health and social care workers
3. All those 75 years of age and over
4. All those 70 years of age and over **AND** Clinically extremely vulnerable individuals (not including pregnant women and those under 16 years of age)
5. All those 65 years of age and over
6. Adults aged 16 to 65 years in an at-risk group
7. All those 60 years of age and over
8. All those 55 years of age and over
9. All those 50 years of age and over

**Will testing for COVID-19 still continue after the vaccines have been done?**

Yes testing will still continue, this will help to continue to keep our communities and care settings safe. You can still carry the virus on your body and clothes if you come into contact with it, meaning you could still infect others once you have been vaccinated. You will therefore still need to follow the guidance in your workplace, including wearing the correct personal protection equipment and taking part in any screening programmes.

**Does the vaccine cause infertility?**

There is no scientific evidence to suggest that the vaccine could cause infertility in women. In addition, infertility is not known to occur as a result of natural COVID-19 disease, further demonstrating that immune responses to the virus, whether induced by infection or a vaccine, are not a cause of infertility.

The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is a mRNA vaccine. It contains a small piece of the SARS-CoV-2 virus’s genetic material that instructs cells in the body to make the virus’s distinctive “spike” protein. After a person is vaccinated, their body produces copies of the spike protein, which does not cause disease, and triggers the immune system to learn to react defensively, producing an immune response against SARS-CoV-2. Contrary to false reports on social media, this protein is not the same as any involved in formation of the placenta.

**Should I still have the vaccine if I’m breastfeeding?**

There are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in breastfeeding or on the breastfed infant. Despite this, COVID-19 vaccines are not thought to be a risk to the breastfeeding infant, and the benefits of breast-feeding are well known. Because of this, the JCVI has recommended that the vaccine can be received whilst breastfeeding. This is in line with recommendations in the USA and from the World Health Organisation.

**I’m pregnant, should I still have the vaccine?**

There is no known risk with giving inactivated virus or bacterial vaccines or toxoids during pregnancy or whilst breast-feeding. However, the COVID-19 vaccines have not yet been tested in pregnant women, so it has been advised that until more information is available, pregnant women should not routinely have these vaccines. As a matter of caution, COVID-19 vaccine is therefore not routinely advised in pregnancy but there are some circumstances in which the potential benefits of vaccination are particularly important for pregnant women. This may include women who are at very high risk of catching the infection or those with certain medical conditions that put them at high risk of suffering serious complications from COVID-19 infection. In such circumstances, a woman may choose to have COVID-19 vaccine in pregnancy following a discussion with her doctor or nurse.

If a COVID-19 vaccine is given to a pregnant woman, she should be reassured that the vaccine does not contain live SARS-CoV-2 virus and therefore cannot cause COVID-19 infection in her or in her baby. Some COVID-19 vaccines contain a different harmless virus to help deliver the vaccine – whilst this virus is live, it cannot reproduce and so will not cause infection in a pregnant woman or her baby.

**What if I find out I’m pregnant after having the vaccine?**

If you find out that you are pregnant after you have had the vaccine, don’t worry. The vaccines do not contain organisms that multiply in the body, so they cannot cause COVID-19 infection in your unborn baby. As they have done for other vaccines, PHE is establishing a monitoring system to follow up women who are vaccinated in pregnancy to help reassure women as time goes on.

**I’m trying to conceive, should I still have the vaccine?**

Here are the key points you should consider:

* 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)
* If you are pregnant but think you are at high risk, you should discuss having or completing vaccination with your doctor or nurse.

Although the vaccine has not been tested in pregnancy, you may decide that the known risks from COVID-19 are so clear that you wish to go ahead with vaccination. There is no advice to avoid pregnancy after COVID-19 vaccination. If you are breastfeeding, you may decide to wait until you have finished breastfeeding and then have the vaccination.

**Can my child have the vaccination?**

The vaccines have yet to be tested in children <12 years old (these trials are underway) and so have not been licensed for use in this group. Given the very low risk of COVID-19 infection to children they are not currently part of the national vaccination programme, however it may be that children with specific underlying medical conditions may be considered after the initial roll-out phase.

**How do I get a vaccine?**

In a national survey, more than 82% of social care workers said they intended to get vaccinated against COVID-19. To help make this happen and to protect our social care staff, residents and tenants, North Yorkshire County Council is currently working with our local CCGs and NHS Trusts to ensure that you are prioritised for vaccination. The NHS will let you know when it's your turn to have the vaccine. Do not contact your GP practice or other NHS services before then. You will be contacted directly with details of how to book and where to go.

Vaccinations are only available through the NHS. You can be contacted by the NHS, your employer, or a GP surgery local to you, to receive your vaccine. Remember, the vaccine is free of charge.

* The NHS will never ask you for your bank account or card details.
* The NHS will never ask you for your PIN or banking password.
* The NHS will never arrive unannounced at your home to administer the vaccine.
* The NHS will never ask you to prove your identity by sending copies of personal documents such as your passport, driving licence, bills or pay slips.

**Need more information?**

The following links may be able to help you:

* NHS guide to COVID-19 vaccination
  + <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/>
* COVID-19 vaccination guide for social care staff
  + <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-a-guide-for-social-care-staff/covid-19-vaccination-a-guide-for-social-care-staff>
* COVID-19 vaccination guide for older adults
  + <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-guide-for-older-adults>
* COVID-19 vaccination for women of childbearing age, currently pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding
  + <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-women-of-childbearing-age-currently-pregnant-planning-a-pregnancy-or-breastfeeding>
* COVID-19 vaccination guide for healthcare workers
  + <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-guide-for-healthcare-workers>