



# The NHS COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

7 January 2021

Frequently Asked Questions

## Introduction

Following extensive trials, two safe and effective vaccines for COVID-19 have been approved by regulators and are now available. The vaccine is the best way to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and we want to encourage as many at risk groups as possible to take up the vaccine.

The NHS is continuing to prioritise those the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and government has decided will benefit the most – starting with the over-80s, care home residents and staff.

The NHS has made an excellent start to rolling out COVID-19 vaccines, this is the biggest vaccination programme the NHS has ever undertaken and is a huge challenge. The NHS is experienced in delivering millions of vaccines a year and is moving quickly to roll out this vaccine to those who need it. It is a rolling programme with the vaccine being given to those at greatest risk first.

In Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, we were among the first areas to receive the vaccination and have been gradually rolling out the programme as vaccine supplies become available. We have seen a fantastic uptake to the vaccine so far, and as vaccine supply increases, we hope to offer the vaccine to more people. We will continue to increase our capacity to deliver the vaccine with additional local vaccination services, hospital hubs and vaccination centres over the coming weeks and months.

The public have an important part to play in supporting the vaccine roll-out:

- please don't contact the NHS to seek a vaccine, we will contact you;
- when we do contact you, please attend your booked appointments;
- and please continue to follow all the guidance to control the virus and save lives.

Thank you for your patience and support in what is the largest vaccination programme in the NHS' history. Locally we are ready to deliver the vaccine, as vaccine supply increases. The scale of this programme means that there will be logistical challenges, but we are experienced in managing vaccination programmes and our staff are working hard to deliver the vaccine quickly.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Eligibility and prioritisation

### **How will GPs be told who to vaccinate?**

The JCVI have set criteria for who should get the vaccine in order of priority. GPs, working together with their partners at a local level, will call in or go out to patients based on the prioritisation of the JCVI, using their patient records and those of neighbouring practices. A national invite and recall system, drawn from GP patient records, will also be used.

### **Do vulnerable people travel to get the vaccine or does it come to them?**

We are planning a mixed approach to ensure that people who are eligible can get the vaccine safely. For care home residents and those who can't leave home, this will involve roving community teams coming to them.

### **Why are healthcare workers amongst the first groups to receive the vaccine?**

The JCVI have put patient-facing health and social care staff into a priority group because of their heightened risk of exposure to the virus. Healthcare workers are not the top priority though, and with limited vaccine available up to now, employers have been asked to offer the vaccine to the most at risk healthcare workers first. With many more doses now expected over the coming weeks, employers will be widening this out and protecting staff as soon as possible.

### **If a household has a priority group member, such as an NHS frontline worker or vulnerable person, will everyone living in that household be vaccinated together?**

These decisions are for the JCVI. Their current prioritisation plan does not include household members of NHS staff or clinically vulnerable people automatically – although in some cases family members may be eligible in their own right.

### **Are there any groups that shouldn't have the vaccine?**

People with history of a severe allergy to the ingredients of the vaccines should not be vaccinated.

The MHRA have updated their guidance to say that pregnant women and those who are breastfeeding can have the vaccine but should discuss it with a clinician to ensure that the benefits outweigh any potential risks.

### **Should people who have already had COVID-19 get vaccinated?**

Yes, if they are in a priority group identified by JCVI. The MHRA have looked at this and decided that getting vaccinated is just as important for those who have already had COVID-19 as it is for those who haven't.

### **My relative is in a care home, how do they get vaccinated?**

There is clear evidence that those living in care homes for older adults (nursing and residential) have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Evidence strongly indicates that the single greatest risk of mortality from COVID-19 is increasing age and that the risk increases exponentially with age. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) have advised the first priority group for receipt of COVID vaccination are residents in care homes for older adults and their carers.

In Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, our PCNs are working hard to vaccinate all care home residents and staff as quickly as possible with all immunisation visits subject to guidance, thorough risk assessments, infection and prevention control measures. The Primary Care Networks (PCNs) (groups of GP practices) will be delivering the vaccine through roving teams. These GP led teams are experienced in successfully delivering the winter flu vaccine each year.

Due to the scale of the care home vaccine programme this will be a gradual roll out and all care homes will be contacted within the coming weeks.

### **When will I receive a second dose of the vaccine?**

[New guidance on when patients should receive their second dose was published on the 30 December.](#) This means that some patients who were booked an appointment to receive their second dose after 4 January may need to be postponed so that services can give the first dose to more people. The new guidance from the JCVI on the period between doses also means that we will be to get the maximum benefit for the most people in the shortest possible time and will help save lives.

Patients still need to receive their second vaccine, and it is important that they attend their second appointment once scheduled.

There are no safety concerns in the new guidance where people have already had their second dose of the vaccine earlier than 12 weeks after their first dose.

### **Do I need two doses of the vaccine?**

Two doses of the vaccine are still needed to get the best protection from the virus, but significant protection is still provided at twenty-two days after the first dose. New guidance will therefore help ensure that as many people as possible benefit from the first dose of the vaccine as soon as possible.

## About the roll-out

### **How will patients be invited for a vaccination?**

When it is the right time people will be contacted to make their appointments. For most people they will receive a letter either from their GP or the national booking system; this will include all the information they need, including their NHS number. Some services are currently also phoning and texting patients to invite them in.

We know lots of people will be eager to get protected but we would ask people not to contact the NHS to get an appointment until they are contacted. The NHS is working hard to make sure those at greatest risk are offered the vaccine first.

When you book your first dose you will also be asked to book your second. For most people this will be within three months of your first dose. The [UK Chief Medical Officers have agreed](#) this longer timeframe so that more people can get their first dose quickly, and because the evidence shows that one dose offers a high level of protection. Getting both doses remains important so we would urge people to return for it at the right time.

### **Is it safe to attend an appointment for my vaccine?**

The NHS is working hard to keep you safe from COVID-19 through a range of measures including cleaning and disinfecting and having social distancing in waiting areas. Please also wear a face covering to your appointment. You should also take the usual steps to minimise your risk as you travel to your appointment.

### **How will patients be prioritised?**

We are following the national guidance to ensure that the vaccine is offered to the most at risk groups. This [poster](#) shows who the priority groups are.

The NHS has a vast amount of experience in delivering vaccine programmes for their patients and will identify the best way to invite at risk groups for the vaccine for their area.

### **I am over 80 and have not received my appointment yet, should I be concerned?**

We are currently vaccinating as rapidly as supplies allow and expect that the vaccination programme will begin to accelerate soon with the increased supply of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

Our practices are working through their lists to offer the vaccine to the most at risk groups as supply becomes available.

If you have not been contacted yet, please be assured that you will be contacted soon. We ask that you do not contact your GP at this time, they will call you for your vaccine when

available. Our GP practices are under increasing demand at this time of year, please help them to treat as many patients as possible by waiting to be invited for a vaccine.

**I am classed as clinically extremely vulnerable and have been asked to shield, will I be offered the vaccine soon?**

The clinically extremely vulnerable will be amongst the first priority groups to receive the vaccine. We are following the national guidance, which includes this group.

Following the national guidance, the first priority is the over 80s and care home residents. However, we hope in the coming weeks to be able to extend the vaccine to other groups. If you have not been contacted yet, please be assured that you will be contacted in the coming weeks. We ask that you do not contact your GP at this time, they will call you for your vaccine when available. Our GP practices are under increasing demand at this time of year, please help them to treat as many patients as possible by waiting to be invited for a vaccine.

**Why am I being asked to attend a different GP surgery or large venue to receive my vaccine?**

When contacted for your vaccine, you may be asked to attend an appointment, which may not necessarily be at your local GP surgery. In Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent we are working hard to bring more vaccination sites on-line but, in the meantime, we are encouraging patients to attend the appointment offered and not to delay or decline appointments offered. It may be that several GPs and PCNs are working together to vaccinate their patients from one site. If you are unable to travel to the site, please speak to your GP practice when booking the appointment.

As the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is now easier to transport, we are now able to roll out the vaccine to housebound patients as well.

**Why has my area not gone live with the vaccines?**

We were among the first areas to receive the vaccine and have been working hard to offer the vaccine to the most vulnerable people as quickly as possible.

The vast majority of our Primary Care Networks (PCNs) (groups of GP practices) are now able to offer the vaccine in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, as vaccine supplies become available. There are a small number of areas that are waiting for national approval and for a supply of vaccine to go live.

Due to the scale of the vaccine programme and the availability of the vaccine this was always going to be a gradual roll out nationally. Not all areas would be able to go live at the same time. We are confident that all of our PCNs are ready to deliver the vaccine and will be able to go live soon. We cannot give an exact date as this is subject to national assurance and availability of the vaccine.

We would like to thank you for your patience as more sites become available.

In the meantime, please do not contact your GP practice as they cannot book you an appointment until they know they have the vaccine.

To find out if your area is offering the vaccine visit our [website](#).

### **I missed the call from my GP practice, have I missed my vaccine?**

No, please be assured that we will be contacting people several times to ensure that we get the maximum uptake for the vaccine. The vaccine is the best way to defeat this virus and it is important that as many people as possible take up the vaccine.

Due to the requirements of the vaccine, we do have to move quickly and may have to offer an appointment to someone else in the priority groups. However, vaccines are now regularly being delivered and the NHS will be in contact with you to offer another appointment in the coming weeks.

### **I had to queue outside in the cold for my vaccine.**

We are sorry if you have had delays or had to wait outside. Our sites have been working hard to minimise any waiting times for patients. Due to social distancing in the buildings, we cannot ask people to wait inside.

It is important that people follow the instructions they are given when booking the appointment and arrive at the right time. We are vaccinating large numbers of people at every session to help distribute the vaccine to as many people as possible.

Thanks to our local authority partners and the independent building owners, our sites are being gritted during the winter season.

## **About the vaccine**

### **What vaccine for COVID-19 is currently available?**

Both the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines are now available. Both vaccines have been shown to be safe and offer high levels of protection and have been given regulatory approval by the MHRA.

The Government has in principle secured access to seven different vaccine candidates, across four different vaccine types, totalling over 357 million doses. This includes:

- 40 million doses of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine
- 100m doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine

- 7 million doses of the Moderna vaccine, which is also being assessed by the MHRA.

### **Is the NHS confident the vaccines are safe?**

Yes. The NHS will not offer any COVID-19 vaccinations to the public until independent experts have signed off that it is safe to do so.

The MHRA, the official UK regulator, have said that both of these vaccines have good safety profiles and offer a high level of protection, 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 does the vaccine work?**

The vaccine works by making a protein from the virus that is important for creating protection.

The protein works in the same way they do for other vaccines by stimulating the immune system to make antibodies and cells to fight the infection.

### **How long will my vaccine be effective for?**

We expect these vaccines to work for at least a year – if not longer. This will be constantly monitored.

### **Will the vaccines work with the new strain?**

There is no evidence currently that the new strain will be resistant to the vaccines we have, so we are continuing to vaccinate people as normal. Scientists are looking now in detail at the characteristics of the virus in relation to the vaccines. Viruses, such as the winter flu virus, often branch into different strains but these small variations rarely render vaccines ineffective.

### **Are there any side effects?**

These are important details which the MHRA always consider when assessing candidate vaccines for use. For these vaccines, like lots of others, they have identified that some people might feel slightly unwell, but they report that no significant side effects have been observed in the tens of thousands of people involved in trials.

All patients will be provided with information on the vaccine they have received, how to look out for any side effects, and what to do if they do occur, including reporting them to the MHRA. More information on possible side effects can be found

at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/>

### **When will you publish vaccine ingredients?**

A detailed review of the vaccines and their ingredients have been provided by the MHRA and can be found at the following links:

For the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine information is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-pfizer-biontech-vaccine-for-covid-19>

For the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine information is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca>

The British Islamic Medical Association have produced a helpful guide for the Muslim community which can be found at <https://britishima.org/pfizer-biontech-covid19-vaccine/>

### **What about the allergic reactions that have been reported?**

These vaccines are safe and effective for the vast majority of people – they have been tested on tens of thousands of people and assessed by experts.

Any person with a history of immediate-onset anaphylaxis to the ingredients contained in the vaccines should not receive them. Everybody will also be screened for potential allergic reactions before getting vaccinated. All vaccinators will have the training they need to deal with any rare cases of adverse reactions, and all venues will be equipped to care for people who need it – just like with any other vaccine.

### **How will you monitor safety?**

As with all vaccinations and medicines, patient safety is the NHS number one priority. Public Health England have robust systems in place to monitor surveillance and will be following incident reporting protocols in the usual way.

### **Do I need to leave a space between having the flu vaccine and having the COVID vaccine**

It is not essential to leave time between the flu and COVID-19 vaccine but it is recommended that there should be a gap of a week. We would always encourage anyone who is eligible but not yet taken up their flu jab to do so as soon as possible.

### **Will I still need to follow the social distancing guidance and wear face coverings?**

Yes. The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 infection, and a full course will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill. We do not yet know whether it will stop you from catching

and passing on the virus, but we do expect it to reduce this risk. So, it is still important to follow the guidance in your local area to protect those around you.

To protect yourself and your family, friends and colleagues you still need to:

- practice social distancing
- wear a face mask
- wash your hands carefully and frequently
- follow the [current guidance](#).

It may take a week or two for your body to build up some protection from the first dose of vaccine. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective, so you should continue to take recommended precautions to avoid infection. Some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but this should be less severe.

### **Can you 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 your vaccination appointment.

The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

Although a mild fever can occur within a day or two of vaccination, if you have any other COVID-19 symptoms or your fever lasts longer, stay at home and arrange to have a test.

Further information on symptoms is available on [NHS.UK](#).

### **Where can I find out more about the vaccination programme?**

Further information can be found online by visiting [www.nhs.uk/coronavirus](http://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus)