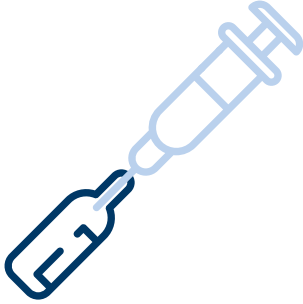# Life EHS
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COVID-19 Vaccinations

Frequently Asked Questions

What is vaccination?

Vaccination is a simple, safe, and effective way of protecting people against harmful diseases before they come into contact with them. Vaccines use your body's natural defenses to build resistance to infectious diseases and make your immune system stronger.

Vaccines train your immune system to create antibodies, just as it does when it's exposed to a disease. However, because most vaccines contain only inactivated or weakened forms of germs like viruses or bacteria, they do not cause the disease or put you at risk of disease complications.

Most vaccines are given by injection, but some are given orally (by mouth) or sprayed into the nose.

Why are vaccines important?

Vaccination is the most important thing we can do to protect ourselves and our children against ill health.

The COVID-19 vaccine will assist in:

- Preventing more deaths
- Reducing severity of illness
- Achieving herd immunity (also known as population immunity) and preventing ongoing transmission
- Reducing the burden on our healthcare system

Lowering the possibility of the COVID-19 virus circulating in the community protects those who cannot be vaccinated (due to health conditions like allergies).

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What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccine has been developed to provide immunity against COVID-19. In general, vaccines contain weakened or inactive parts of a particular organism that triggers an immune response within the body.

This weakened version will not cause the disease in the person receiving the vaccine, but it will prompt their immune system to respond. Some vaccines require multiple doses, given weeks or months apart. This is sometimes needed to allow for the production of long-lived antibodies and the development of memory cells. In this way, the body is trained to fight the specific disease-causing organism, building up memory against the virus so it can fight it in the future.
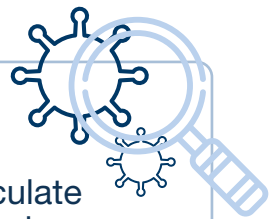
What is herd immunity?

When a lot of people in a community are vaccinated, the virus cannot circulate easily, because most of the people it encounters are immune. If most people are vaccinated, those who are not protected by vaccines are less likely to contract or be exposed to the harmful virus. This is called herd immunity.

No single vaccine provides 100% protection, and herd immunity does not provide full protection to those who cannot safely be vaccinated. But, with herd immunity, these people will have substantial protection, thanks to those around them being vaccinated. Vaccinating not only protects yourself but also protects those in the community who are unable to be vaccinated.

What process is followed before a vaccine is given to the public?

Before COVID-19 vaccines can be administrated:

1. The vaccine must be proven safe and effective in large clinical trials.
2. A series of independent clinical reviews of the efficacy and safety of the vaccine is required.
3. This evidence must also be reviewed for policy recommendations on how the vaccine should be used.
4. An external panel of experts convened by the World Health Organization (WHO), called the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE), analyses the results from clinical trials.
5. The panel then recommends whether and how the vaccines should be used.
6. Officials in individual countries decide whether to approve the vaccine for national use and develop policies for how to use it in their country based on the WHO recommendations.

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Should I be vaccinated even if I've already been infected with the COVID-19 virus?

Getting COVID-19 might offer some natural protection or immunity from reinfection with the virus that causes COVID-19. But it's not clear how long this protection lasts. Since reinfection is possible and COVID-19 can cause severe medical complications, it is recommended that people who have already had COVID-19 get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Can a COVID-19 vaccine infect me with the COVID-19 virus?

No. In most cases, vaccines contain weakened or inactive parts of a particular organism that triggers an immune response within the body. This weakened version will not cause the disease or virus in the person receiving the vaccine, but it will prompt their immune system to respond.
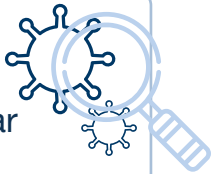
If I am currently infected with the COVID-19 virus, have any flu-like symptoms or have previously had the virus and recovered – how long should I wait until being vaccinated?

If you have or have had the COVID-19 virus, you can get vaccinated, assuming you don't still have symptoms or an active infection. If you are feeling ill or have any concerns, you must consult with your doctor before being vaccinated.

Is there a risk of an allergic reaction if I am vaccinated?

It is possible that an allergic reaction might occur, as with any medication or vaccine. Everyone who gets a vaccination must be monitored for at least 15 minutes after the vaccine has been administered. The medications and equipment needed to manage allergic reactions will be available at every vaccination site.

Anyone who has previously had any allergic reaction should advise the vaccination team beforehand to be monitored for a longer time after being vaccinated.

Can I be vaccinated against other illness, such as flu and receive the COVID-19 vaccination at the same time?

If you are vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus first, it is recommended that you wait at least 14 days before getting any other vaccine, including a flu vaccine.

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Do I still need to take my flu vaccine if I have taken the COVID-19 vaccine?

The flu vaccine won't protect you against COVID-19, but it will protect you against the flu. Since the flu season and COVID-19 are now overlapping, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) in South Africa has recommended that everyone, in particular those who are at high-risk of developing severe flu and flu-related complications, receive a flu vaccination ahead of influenza season this year.

Is it safe to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when I have TB, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), kidney transplant/kidney failure or other underlying conditions?

Anyone with underlying conditions or co-morbidities must consult with their doctor before being vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus.
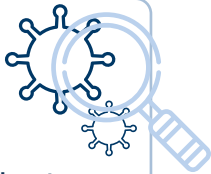
Can I be vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus if I am pregnant?

Although at no greater risk of being infected with SARS-CoV-2, research indicates that pregnant women are far more likely to develop complications from COVID-19.

Therefore, the South African National Department of Health recommends that the COVID-19 vaccine is offered to all pregnant women who are eligible for vaccination, and who have completed 14 weeks of gestation.

Pregnant women are encouraged to engage with their healthcare providers for more information on the benefits and risks of receiving the COVID-19 vaccination.

Is it safe to be vaccinated whilst breastfeeding?

The COVID-19 vaccine can be safely used for women who are breastfeeding.

Can my children have the COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccine has only been tested in persons above 18 years of age.

Therefore, at this time, the WHO does not recommend vaccination of persons under 18 years of age, even if they belong to a high-risk group.

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Can I stop following COVID-19 safety precautions after getting a COVID-19 vaccine?

Experts want to learn more about the protection that a COVID-19 vaccine provides and how long immunity lasts before changing safety recommendations. Factors such as how many people get vaccinated and how the virus is spreading in communities will also affect these recommendations.

The best protection we can offer each other right now is to continue to follow current guidelines. So even when you have received the vaccine, it will still be mandatory to follow the COVID-19 safety guidelines. This includes mask wearing and PPE protocols, social distancing and hand hygiene.

- Avoid close contact with others
- Wear a mask in public places
- Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands with soap and water frequently or sanitising with alcohol hand-rub
- Stay home if you're sick

Can I have the vaccine if I have symptoms of COVID-19 or am in quarantine or isolation?
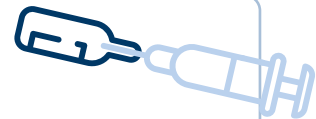
If you are in quarantine due to having had close contact with someone who is infected with the COVID-19 virus, you should finish your 10-day quarantine period before being vaccinated.

There is no data available to show that the vaccination immediately post-exposure will prevent COVID-19, as it is unlikely that the vaccine would cause an immune response quickly enough to protect you from developing the COVID-19 virus.

If you are currently infected with the COVID-19 virus, you should wait a minimum of 30 days after recovery to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

What are the possible COVID-19 vaccine side-effects and if any side-effects occur, how will this be managed?

Everyone being vaccinated will be monitored at the vaccination site for 15 to 30 minutes after vaccination. Medical staff, who have been trained to manage any side-effects, will be on hand to assist with any side-effects that may occur during the monitoring period. Should you experience any side-effects after leaving the vaccination site, please consult your healthcare provider and inform your line manager. See the COVID-19 Vaccine symptoms information leaflet for further details.

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5. *Sisonke COVID-19 Vaccine Fact Sheet 16-02-2021.pdf*

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