

# COVID-19 VACCINES IN NEWCASTLE AND GATESHEAD: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

[Last updated: 15 January 2021]

## WE'RE MAKING RAPID PROGRESS

The Covid-19 vaccination is the largest vaccine programme in the history of the NHS, and we are making rapid progress here in Newcastle and Gateshead.

The NHS is delivering the vaccine through hospital hubs, local vaccine centres provided by groups of GP practices and pharmacies, and large-scale vaccination centres for high volumes of people.

In Gateshead, we have a vaccination hub at Queen Elizabeth Hospital as well as GP-led centres at Blaydon, Birtley, Felling, Old Fold and Bensham.

In Newcastle, we have centres at Newcastle Racecourse and the Eagles Basketball stadium.

Some people will also get invitations to attend the new service at the Centre for Life so that we can immunise as many people as possible.

Our teams are working incredibly hard to vaccinate everyone as fast as possible, and we are prioritising patients based on strict national guidelines for age and clinical risk level.

Our local programme is now fully underway, but please don't be worried if you or a family member are in the first priority group but have not heard from us yet. You might know someone who has already been invited, but that doesn't mean that you are a lower priority.

During January and February many more people will be invited in, but this is only the start of a major vaccination programme and it will take some time to reach everyone. Our teams can only vaccinate as many patients as supplies allow.

We very much understand that you may feel anxious while waiting your turn, but you do not need to contact your GP surgery as you will be contacted when it is your turn to have the vaccine.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP THE NHS

- Please continue to follow all the guidance to control the virus and save lives – that means staying at home as much as possible and following the 'hands, face, space' guidance when you are out.
- Please don't contact your practice to seek a vaccine, they will contact you

- When you are invited, please be sure to attend your booked appointments.
- Please attend your appointment on your own. If you need assistance, please bring only one person with you. If we have more people attending, it is difficult for us to maintain social distancing.

We have outlined answers to some frequently asked questions below:

## GETTING THE VACCINE

### Who will get the vaccine first?

The Government has confirmed that the vast majority of Covid-19 vaccinations administered by hospital hubs and local vaccination services in the initial phase will be prioritised for those 80 years of age and over, frontline health and social care workers.

Please be assured that **everyone who wants to have the vaccine will be able to**, but as you will appreciate a vaccination programme of this scale will take time to be rolled out.

The NHS has also worked through distribution mechanisms to ensure that care home residents can now safely be offered a vaccination across the country.

Following the priority groups outlined above, the next phase will include:

- 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

It is estimated that taken together, these groups represent around 99% of preventable deaths from Covid-19.

Details of the national advice on priority groups for the vaccine is available on the [Government website](#).

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

When it is the right time people will receive an invitation to come forward. For most people this will be a letter or phone call, either from their GP or the national NHS. This letter will include all the information a person will need to book appointments. 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.

Some people who have been vaccinated by their GP may still get an invitation to a vaccination centre like the Centre for Life. This letter can be disregarded if you have already had your vaccine from your GP. This letter is not an invitation for a second dose of your vaccine and remember you can wait for an invitation from your GP if you would prefer to be vaccinated there rather than at a mass vaccination centre.

### **Why is the NHS vaccinating some groups before others?**

Independent analysis suggests that one life is saved for every 20 vaccines given to care home residents. For other over-80s, 160 vaccines have to be given to save a life.

The numbers needed to vaccinate per life saved go up as we move down the priority groups. These figures come from actuarial analysis of the pandemic so far, and are completely independent. Getting our most vulnerable vaccinated as quickly as we can while transmission rates are high will undoubtedly save lives.

### **Why have I been invited to a vaccination centre outside my area?**

The NHS has opened a number of large-scale vaccination centres including one at the Centre for Life in Newcastle. Invitations to book an appointment are being sent to people aged 80 or over who have not yet been vaccinated and live up to 45 minutes' drive from a centre. This includes people who live in Gateshead.

You are free to choose which site you wish to attend for your vaccine.

### **Why do I have to wait for my vaccination?**

The vaccination programme is still at an early stage. The NHS is offering vaccinations to those at greatest risk from Covid-19 first, in line with recommendations from the Joint Committee for Vaccinations & Immunisations (JCVI).

The first groups being offered vaccinations are care home residents and workers, frontline health and social care staff and people aged 80 and over. As more vaccine becomes available, we will be able to offer appointments to a wider group of people.

## **I work for the NHS / in social care, when will I receive the vaccination?**

Vaccination of patient-facing health and social care workers will be co-ordinated through your employer. You will receive an invitation to attend for your vaccine as soon as possible and in line with national guidance on priority groups.

## **I am housebound, can I get the vaccine?**

We will be vaccinating housebound patients as soon as we have completed vaccinating care home residents and staff. We will contact you to arrange an appointment but please be aware that we will vaccinate people in age order, i.e. starting with those aged 80 and over.

## **Can I get one privately?**

No. Vaccinations will only be available through the NHS for the moment. Anyone who claims to be able to provide you with a vaccine for a fee is likely to be committing a crime and should be reported to the Police 101 service and/or Local Trading Standards.

## **I have been told to pay for a vaccine**

The vaccine is only available on the NHS for free to people in priority groups, and the NHS will contact you when it is your turn. Anyone offering a paid-for vaccine is committing a crime.

The NHS will never ask you to press a button on your keypad or send a text to confirm you want the vaccine, and never ask for payment or for your bank details.

If you receive a call you believe to be fraudulent, hang up. If you believe you have been the victim of fraud or identity theft you should report this directly to **Action Fraud** on 0300 123 2040. Where the victim is vulnerable, and particularly if you are worried that someone has or might come to your house, report it to the Police online or by calling 101.

## **ABOUT THE VACCINES**

### **What vaccines for Covid-19 are 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 Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

## **Can people pick which vaccine they want?**

Any vaccines that the NHS provide will have been approved because they pass the MHRA's tests on safety and efficacy. People should be assured that whatever Covid-19 vaccine they get will be effective.

## **Is the vaccine safe?**

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

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 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.

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.

[Read about the approved Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for Covid-19 by MHRA on GOV.UK](#)

[Read about the approved Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine for Covid-19 by MHRA on GOV.UK](#)

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

There is currently no evidence 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.

## **Do the vaccines include any parts from foetal or animal origin?**

There is no material of foetal or animal origin in either vaccine currently in use. All ingredients are published in the healthcare information on the [MHRA's website](#).

For the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine information is available here:

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

For the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine information is available here:

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

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

Like all medicines, the vaccine can cause side effects. Most side effects of the Covid-19 vaccine are mild and should not last longer than a week, such as:

- a sore arm where the needle went in
- feeling tired
- a headache
- feeling achy

### **Should people who have already had Covid get vaccinated?**

The MHRA have advised that getting vaccinated is just as important for those who have already had Covid-19. It is advised that if you have had Covid you need to wait four weeks before you can be vaccinated.

### **Will the Covid-19 vaccine protect me from flu?**

No, the COVID-19 vaccine will not protect you against the flu.

### **Are there any people who shouldn't have the vaccine?**

People with history of a severe allergy to the ingredients of the vaccines should not be vaccinated. People who have ever had a severe allergy (anaphylaxis) where the cause was not identified should not have the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine but can have the Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine.

### **What about pregnancy and breastfeeding?**

The MHRA has updated its guidance to say that pregnant women and those who are breastfeeding can have the vaccine. Pregnant women can discuss it with a clinician to ensure that the benefits outweigh any potential risks should they wish. Similarly, advice for women planning a pregnancy has also been updated and there is no need for women to delay pregnancy after having the vaccination.

### **I'm currently ill with Covid-19, can I get the vaccine?**

People currently unwell and experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should not receive the vaccine until they have recovered. The guidance says this should be at least four weeks after the start of symptoms or from the date of a positive Covid-19 test.

## **GETTING THE SECOND DOSE**

### **Why are second doses of the vaccine being rescheduled?**

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. This decision will allow us to get the maximum benefit for the most people in the shortest possible time and will help save lives.

The latest evidence suggests the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine provides protection for most people for up to three months.

Getting both doses remains important so we would urge people to return for it at the right time which will be between 10 and 12 weeks from the first dose.

### **Will I be at greater risk if I don't get a second dose after three weeks?**

The science suggests that protection comes 10-14 days after the first dose. Trials show that at three weeks, the Pfizer vaccine is 89% effective and the Astra Zeneca vaccine is 73% effective.

In the Astra Zeneca vaccine trial, second doses were given after varying time periods, with no suggestion that a delayed second dose gave inferior protection. There is no immunological reason why protection should wane between 3 and 12 weeks. Scientists are watching very carefully for any evidence that protection reduces between 3 and 12 weeks, and none has been found.

### **Will I have less long-term protection if I receive the second dose after 12 weeks?**

There is no reason to think that a second dose at 12 weeks will give inferior long term protection, and lots of science to suggest this may actually give better long term protection.

For most vaccines, the best time for a booster dose is well beyond three weeks after the primary dose. In fact, a second dose too close to the first dose often means there is a lesser immune response in the long run.

### **I'm in a vulnerable group. Can I get a second dose after three weeks?**

There is no evidence that people in clinically vulnerable groups get any lesser protection from the first dose of vaccine than the general population. Giving people in

these groups a second vaccine would delay the first dose for other vulnerable people. We do not have the option of making exceptions.

### **Where can I find out more?**

The latest information is available on the [NHS website](#). The BBC has also produced some helpful information about the vaccines [in five South Asian languages](#).