



## COVID-19 Response - Updates and Resources

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COVID-19 Response - Updates and Resources



### **COVID-19 Vaccines** Frequently Asked Questions

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*This guidance has been developed by the Department of Operational Support (DOS) to provide answers to frequently asked questions on the UN system-wide approach to vaccinating UN personnel. It will be updated on a regular basis.*

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## **How will I receive my COVID-19 vaccination?**

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The UN has requested Member States to include UN personnel in the national/host country COVID-19 vaccination programmes. While confirming the inclusion of UN personnel within their national planning, most Member States have advised that they will be providing the vaccine free of charge. The vaccine may also be available and accessed through a primary care provider, and in many cases that cost will be covered by medical insurance.

In countries where there is no national programme in place, or in which UN personnel are not included in the national distribution programme, the UN Department of Operational Support (DOS) has been tasked by the Secretary-General to identify alternative arrangements for making the vaccine available. DOS is working to ensure alternative arrangements are put in place for UN personnel.

Member States have also been requested by the Secretary-General to follow the WHO's Values Framework and Prioritization Roadmap for the fair and equitable allocation and prioritization of the COVID-19 vaccine.

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## **Who is included in the UN-led vaccination programme?**

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In locations where there are no national COVID-19 vaccination programmes and where UN personnel may not have access to COVID-19 vaccine, the UN, through the Department of Operational Support (DOS), is working to ensure alternative arrangements are put in place for such personnel through a UN-led COVID-19 vaccination programme.

The UN-led COVID-19 vaccination programme intends to support the following categories of individuals - who are present in the location in which the UN-led COVID-19 vaccination programme is being carried out:

- UN Personnel: Staff (both Secretariat and Agencies, Funds and Programmes, including Specialized Agencies), UNVs, consultants, individual contractors, interns, others with direct UN contracts and retirees of both Secretariat and agencies, funds and programmes, including specialized agencies.
- Eligible Dependents: Dependents recognized; under the rules and regulations of the respective UN entity.
- International personnel of close implementing partners supporting UN programme implementation.

The UN-led COVID-19 vaccination programme does not include anyone located in countries offering robust national COVID-19 vaccination programmes. It should also be noted that vaccines are currently not approved for use in children under the age of 16.

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## How will the UN prioritize vaccinations in the UN-led vaccination programmes?

The UN will base its prioritization roadmap for UN personnel and eligible dependents on the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) Roadmap for prioritizing uses of COVID-19 vaccines in the context of limited supply. This roadmap allows for individuals who are at greater risk of exposure to the virus, or who will likely suffer a more severe course of illness if contracting the virus to receive the vaccine first. Such priority groups include health care workers and other front-line workers, as well as the aged, and those of any age with underlying health conditions.

It should be noted that all UN personnel receiving the vaccines from national authorities should adhere to the local health authorities' directives on prioritization of individuals. While WHO makes recommendations for prioritization, not all countries follow exactly the sequence outlined in the WHO prioritization roadmap.

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## When can I expect to receive my vaccination?

Most UN personnel should receive the COVID-19 vaccine through their own national/host country vaccination programmes, according to the timelines and prioritization guidelines of those programmes. UN personnel should be receiving their vaccination based on their particular status (age, health status, etc.) within the local health authorities' or WHO's prioritization roadmap.

In duty stations where vaccination through the national programme may not be possible, the Department of Operational Support (DOS) is working to ensure alternative arrangements are put in place for UN personnel and their eligible dependents.

Additional information will be communicated as soon as it becomes available, through the UN COVID-19 webpage, the iSeek COVID-19 page, and your office.

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## Is vaccination against COVID-19 mandatory for UN staff?

All UN personnel are encouraged to receive the COVID-19 vaccination, but it is not mandatory. Any immunization procedure, regardless of whether it has been approved by WHO or endorsed by the Medical Directors, should be based on the recipient's informed consent. It is recommended that all UN personnel and eligible dependents participating in national vaccination campaigns obtain comprehensive information/briefing from their healthcare provider on the type of vaccine being offered, in order to be able to exercise an informed decision about whether or not to take the vaccine being offered by the national/ host country.

More WHO information on the COVID-19 vaccine can be found [here](#). For more information from the UN Medical Directors regarding COVID-19 vaccines, see [here](#).

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## Will medical insurance pay for the vaccine?

In situations where vaccines are not offered free of charge by national governments, they will be covered by the medical insurance policies as follows:

- Cigna Worldwide
- UNHQ administered health plans (Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, AETNA, CIGNA Worldwide and MIP) and Geneva based plan UNSMIS will cover all reasonable and customary costs of COVID-19 vaccines.
- Vienna based plans with Allianz Care will cover 80% of the costs of COVID-19 vaccines.

## Will I be offered a choice of vaccine?

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At this time, in most countries, people will not be able to choose the kind or the brand of vaccine they want. This, however, could change as other vaccines are authorized for use and vaccine supplies increase.

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## What if I do not want to receive the specific type of vaccine offered to me?

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It will be up to the individual to decide if they want to be vaccinated or not and whether they want to accept the type of vaccination being offered by the national/ host country or the UN. It is also important to remember that UN personnel are also expected to comply with all requirements mandated by the host country and national authorities.

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## Is it still safe to get vaccinated if my country's local health authorities only offer a vaccine that is not approved by the World Health Organization and/or endorsed by the United Nations Medical Directors?

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All UN personnel are encouraged to receive the COVID-19 vaccination, but it is not mandatory. Any immunization procedure, regardless if approved by WHO or endorsed by the Medical Directors, should be based on the recipient's informed consent.

It is recommended that all UN personnel and eligible dependents participating in national vaccination campaigns obtain comprehensive information/briefing from their healthcare provider on the type of vaccine being offered, in order to be able to exercise an informed decision about whether or not to take the vaccine being offered by their country.

The UN Medical Directors recommend that all UN personnel should weigh, on an individual basis, the risks of contracting a severe COVID-19 illness, and the type of vaccine available to them, when making such an informed decision.

- More WHO information on the COVID-19 vaccines.
- More information from the UN Medical Directors regarding COVID-19 vaccines.

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## What can I do now to help protect myself from getting COVID-19 as I wait for my vaccination, or since a vaccine is not yet available in my country?

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You should continue covering your mouth and nose with a mask, washing your hands regularly and staying at least 6 feet (or depending on local health authorities' recommendations) away from others and avoid crowded areas with poor ventilation. These steps will help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others.

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## Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

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The World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners are committed to accelerating the development of COVID-19 vaccines while ensuring that all vaccines are as safe as possible. All clinical trials are rigorously evaluating vaccines for safety.

- More WHO information on the COVID-19 vaccines.
  - More information from the UN Medical Directors regarding COVID-19 vaccines.
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## How do the vaccines work?

Vaccines are all designed to teach the body's immune system to safely recognize and block the virus that causes COVID-19. Several different types of vaccines for COVID-19 have been developed, or are in development, including: *inactivated or weakened virus vaccines*, which use a form of the virus that has been inactivated or weakened so it doesn't cause disease, but still generates an immune response; *protein-based vaccines*, which use harmless fragments of proteins or protein shells that mimic the COVID-19 virus to safely generate an immune response; *viral vector vaccines*, which use a virus that has been genetically engineered so that it can't cause disease but produces coronavirus proteins to safely generate an immune response; and *RNA and DNA vaccines*, a cutting-edge approach that uses genetically engineered RNA or DNA to generate a protein that itself safely prompts an immune response.

For more information about all COVID-19 vaccines in development, see this WHO publication. (Source: WHO)

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

No. None of the current vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. This means that a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19. However, as with all other vaccines, you may have some side effects, which are normal signs that your body is building immune protection. Common side effects observed with the COVID-19 vaccines may include:

- On the arm where you receive the vaccine: pain and swelling;
- Throughout the rest of your body: fever, chills, tiredness, headache.

These side effects may affect your ability to perform daily activities, but they should typically go away within a few days.

You are encouraged to read the following information on vaccine safety and common side effects.

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## Is it safe to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I have an underlying medical condition? [^Top](#)

COVID-19 vaccination is especially important for people with underlying health problems (e.g. heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancers, poor immunity and obesity). Such individuals are more likely to develop a severe form of COVID-19.

You should always consult with your health care provider if you have specific questions about the COVID-19 vaccine and your health. On very rare occasions, allergic reactions can occur. If you have had allergic reactions to any vaccines, drugs, medical products, foods etc. in the past, you should discuss the vaccination with your healthcare provider.

You are encouraged to read the following information on vaccine safety and common side effects.

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## How many doses of vaccines have to be taken and at what time interval? [^Top](#)

This depends on the type of vaccine you are given. With most COVID-19 vaccines, you will need 2 doses in order for them to work, with a few weeks' interval in between. You should get the second shot even if you have side effects after the first dose, unless a vaccination provider/your doctor tells you not to get a second dose.

Different types of vaccines have different vaccination schedules, and other vaccines that are in the process of approval and /or development may require just a single dose.

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## Can I return to life as normal after I've been vaccinated?

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For the time being, even after receiving the vaccine, you should continue to stay vigilant (wear a mask, wash your hands and maintain physical distancing) until the vast majority of the population is immune. We are still awaiting scientific confirmation that a vaccinated person, when exposed to the virus, might continue to spread it to others when asymptomatic. Please note that vaccines continue to protect the person who receives the vaccine.

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## If I have already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

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Yes. The COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to you regardless of whether you have already had the COVID-19 infection previously. The protection from a vaccination appears to provide more effective protection.

However, those who are currently infected with COVID-19 should postpone vaccination until after their illness has run its course and after they have met their health authorities' criteria to discontinue isolation.

Additionally, current evidence suggests that re-infection with the virus that causes COVID-19 is uncommon in the 90 days after initial infection. Therefore, people with a recent infection may delay vaccination until the end of that 90-day period if desired.

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## After I am vaccinated, how long will vaccine immunity last?

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Researchers do not yet know yet how long immunity lasts after vaccination. That is why continuation of public health preventive practices, e.g. wearing a mask, washing your hands regularly and physical distancing, will still be important for some time to come.

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## Why should a vaccine be needed if we have other public health measures like physical distancing and wearing masks, to prevent COVID-19 from spreading?

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Stopping a pandemic requires using all tools available, including:

- Acquiring immunity against COVID-19, naturally (by contracting the illness) or through vaccination.
- Avoiding contracting and spreading COVID-19 by respecting preventive measures like covering your mouth and nose with a mask and staying at least 6 feet (or depending on local health authorities' recommendations) away from others.
- Wearing of masks when you are in crowded settings, where you cannot be at least 6 feet from others and in rooms with poor or unknown ventilation.

Together, being vaccinated against COVID-19 along with following WHO's and other public health recommendations will offer the best protection from COVID-19 for yourself and those around you.

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## If I get a COVID-19 vaccine, will it cause a false positive for COVID-19 diagnostic testing (i.e. PCR or antigen tests)?

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Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine will not cause a positive PCR or antigen laboratory test result since these specific tests check for active disease and not whether an individual is immune or not.

However, it should be noted that the antibody test (or “serology test”) may be positive in someone who has been vaccinated, since that is a specific test that measures COVID-19 immunity in an individual.

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### Additional resources

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- The UN Intranet-iSeek: COVID-19 Response page
- UN COVID-19 Response page
- World Health Organization
- COVAX Explained
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA)
- UNICEF COVAX Information Centre
- WHO SAGE Roadmap For Prioritizing Uses Of COVID-19 Vaccines

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### References

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- [https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-vaccines](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-vaccines)
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>
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