

Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Cumbria

Frequently Asked Questions about Vaccination

A guide for Community Leaders in Cumbria
(Version 1: May 2021)



Introduction

We know many community groups, community leaders and staff who work closely with communities are being asked questions about coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccinations.

This document is designed to help you answer questions from your friends, family and community; it covers some of the basic information about the vaccination programme and the most common questions that we're hearing people ask. It's quite long and detailed, and so it isn't intended to be given out to the public in its entirety. You might want to use it as a reference document, or to pick out a small number of questions and answers to use in local newsletters, etc.

Some of these are practical questions (for example, about how to book an appointment), whilst others are about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines (for example, about the testing they're been through).

This national research gives a good insight into some of the reasons that people are reluctant to receive their coronavirus vaccination when it is offered to them, and the practical barriers facing those who want to receive it but struggle to find a suitable appointment:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/covid19vaccinerefusaluk/februarytomarch2021>

This booklet has been produced by Cumbria Community Resilience Group, which is part of Cumbria Local Resilience Forum, with input from our local NHS and public health teams. If you've got any suggestions on how we could improve future editions, please contact:

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COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

The coronavirus vaccination programme is being delivered only through the NHS, and is always free; it isn't possible to pay for a vaccination privately.

The vaccination programme has prioritised the people who are most at risk of serious complications and hospital admission if they contract coronavirus (particularly older people and people with specific long term medical conditions) and those who have close contact with these clinically vulnerable people (for example, health and care staff).

The vast majority of people in the most vulnerable groups have now received their coronavirus vaccination, and appointments are now being offered to people in younger age groups – at the time of writing, anyone over 40 is able to book an appointment.

You can find the up-to-date national information here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/>

The Coronavirus Vaccines

There are currently 3 different brands of vaccine in use in the UK.

The **Pfizer** vaccine was the first to be approved; it is a mRNA vaccine and needs to be carefully stored and transported at very low temperatures.

The **Oxford/AstraZeneca** vaccine is a “traditional” vaccine, based on a modified adenovirus, and is much easier to store and transport, meaning it can be used in smaller centres and taken to housebound patients.

The **Moderna** vaccine is the most recent addition; it is another mRNA vaccine.

All three vaccines have been shown to be effective against coronavirus, and have been through all the normal safety checks before being approved for use.

This BBC video explains the different vaccines well: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/health-55625276>

Most people won't have a choice about which vaccine they receive, although some groups of people may be advised to receive one type of vaccine in preference to another.

Cumbria's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

You can find the public information on the coronavirus vaccination programme from our local NHS organisations here:

North Cumbria: <https://northcumbriaccg.nhs.uk/covidvaccine>

Morecambe Bay: <https://www.morecambebayccg.nhs.uk/your-health/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-vaccination-programme>

Vaccine hesitancy and “fake news”

Some of the questions are coming up as the result of “fake news” and rumours circulating on social media; <https://fullfact.org/> is a good place to check some of these stories and work out what’s “fact” and what isn’t.

However, please be aware that it’s not generally a good idea to share fake news, even in a social media post that says “this is nonsense, don’t believe it!” – the research shows that people tend to remember the news story, but not necessarily the fact that it was fake news!

You can download the standard COVID-19 vaccination resources from Public Health England to use on social media here: <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/covid-19-vaccine/>

The government’s **SHARE** checklist can help people to identify misinformation and avoid unintentionally sharing it: <https://sharechecklist.gov.uk/>

The key points of the SHARE checklist are:

- **Source:** Make sure the story is written by a source that you trust, with a reputation for accuracy. If it’s an unfamiliar source, try checking the website’s “About Us” section for more information.
- **Headline:** Always read beyond the headline. If it sounds too good to be true, it might very well be! Be wary if something doesn’t seem to add up.
- **Analyse:** Make sure you check the facts; just because you’ve seen a story several times doesn’t mean it’s true. If you’re not sure, look at fact-checking websites and other reliable sources to double check.
- **Retouched:** Check if images look like they might have been retouched or altered. False news stories often contain altered photographs or reedited video clips. Or sometimes images may be authentic, but taken out of context.
- **Errors:** Many false new stories use “lookalike” web addresses – look out for misspellings! Poor grammar and bad layout are other signs that a website might not be genuine.

Vaccine Scams

It’s also been reported that there have been a small number of scam messages related to the COVID-19 vaccine; for example, text messages that appear to be from the NHS but ask for bank account details.

You can find out more about these and how to report them on the Action Fraud website:

<https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/alert/coronavirus-vaccine-scams-warning>

How do I book my COVID-19 vaccination?

People will be invited to book an appointment through the national NHS website, and may wish to travel to get their vaccination quickly:

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

However, travelling isn't the only option – there are local sites on the national system, but these will only show when they have appointments available, so if people check again a few days later, they may well find a local appointment. Many people can wait to be contacted by their GP practice and be offered a local appointment.

However, not all GP practices will be offering COVID-19 vaccines to the under 40s; younger patients from these practices will need to book through the national system.

Q. I've heard people my age can now get their vaccination – how do I book it?

A. You can book your appointment online on the national website:

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

Q. Can I choose which vaccine I'll receive?

A. No, not under most circumstances. There are currently three different vaccines in use in the UK: Pfizer, Oxford Astra Zeneca and Moderna. Which you receive for your first dose will depend on what is available at your local centre at the time. Your second dose will normally be of the same vaccine as your first dose.

There are a few groups of people who may be advised by their doctor to have a specific brand of vaccine in preference to the others – for example, due to severe allergies.

Q. There aren't any local appointments showing on the national website, what should I do?

A. There are a number of centres across Cumbria that can be booked through the national website, but they will only show up when they have appointments available. New slots are added regularly, so it's worth waiting a few days and trying again.

Q. The National Booking System doesn't recognise my name?

A. It's possible that a mis-spelling of your name has been recorded in your NHS record so we would suggest you try alternative spellings if your name does not come up in the National Booking Service.

For example, if your name is Katherine, you might also want to try Kate, Kathryn or Catherine – and if you have a double-barrelled surname, it's worth trying it with and without a hyphen.

Q. I don't know my NHS number.

A. It is OK, you don't need your NHS number to book an appointment, although it's one of ways you can speed up the booking process.

You can find your NHS number on documents like appointment letters and repeat prescriptions.

You can also check it here: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/online-services/find-nhs-number/>

Q. I haven't got internet access, how do I book an appointment?

A. Most people can wait to be called by their GP. You could use the National Booking Service through your local library. If you have a mobile device (such as a smartphone) you may be able to use local hotspots and free wi-fi in town centres. The CCC Helpline staff may also be able to help you book: **0800 783 1966**

Q. I missed/turned down my first vaccination appointment, what should I do?

A. You can still have your vaccination. Use the National Booking Service or call your GP practice for advice. They may be able to call you to their next vaccine session.

Q. Can I choose when I have it, so I can plan to be able to have a quiet day the next day?

A. If you book through the National Booking Service you can choose from any of the slots available remembering that more are released regularly. GP Practices are calling their eligible groups as the vaccine is supplied to them so you may be called at short notice.

Q. I've booked my appointment, but now I can't make it – what should I do?

A. If you can no longer make your appointment (for example, because your shifts at work have changed), you can simply log back on to the national website and change your appointment. Please try to do this if at all possible, as it means your slot will become available to other people.

If you've booked an appointment on the national website, and are then offered a more convenient appointment by your GP practice, you can log back onto the national system and cancel your appointment.

If you've been offered an appointment by GP practice and find you are unable to make it, please ring your GP practice to let them know.

Practical questions about vaccination appointments

Q. How long will it take to get the vaccine?

You are advised to arrive no more than 5 minutes early for your appointment. The process is fairly swift and you may be asked to wait for 15 minutes after the vaccination – especially if you are driving.

Q. Should I still come to my vaccination appointment if I've got coronavirus symptoms?

A. No. If you have symptoms of coronavirus, you should self-isolate and have a test. You can reschedule your appointment. Please do not attend a health setting or mix with people if you have symptoms of coronavirus.

Q. I haven't got a car and can't get to a vaccination site, what help is available?

A. If you are booking through the National Booking Service and the only options showing are a considerable distance away, please check another time. Slots are added regularly and you should be able to book reasonably locally, and certainly within Cumbria – you may have to wait a few days and try again.

You may also be called by your own GP Practice and be asked to travel to a hub site or to your local surgery. If this will be a problem, please talk to your GP practice to see if a more local option can be found.

You may be able to get some support arranging transport through Cumbria County Council's COVID-19 Helpline: **0800 783 1966**

Q. I can't afford to travel to a vaccination site, what help is available?

A. If you are booking through the National Booking Service and the only options showing are a considerable distance away, please check another time. Slots are added regularly and you should be able to book reasonably locally, and certainly within Cumbria – you may have to wait a few days and try again.

You may also be called by your own GP Practice and be asked to travel to a hub site or to your local surgery. If this will be a problem, please talk to your GP practice to see if a more local option can be found.

You may be able to get some support arranging transport through Cumbria County Council's COVID-19 Helpline: **0800 783 1966**

Q. I've been told to come for vaccination by myself, but I don't have anyone I can leave my kids with

A. While people are asked to come alone to their vaccination appointment in order to make social distancing easier, we would urge you to discuss this with your practice if it will stop you getting the vaccine.

Alternatively, you may be able to get some support through Cumbria County Council's COVID-19 Helpline: **0800 783 1966** – for example, they may be able to help you find out if there is a local vaccination centre that has enough space to be able to allow you to take your children along.

Q. My employer won't give me time off work for a vaccination, when else can I get it?

A. Our GP teams deliver vaccines soon after the supply is delivered and this can include evenings and weekends. If you get an invite from your GP Practice you can discuss options with them.

The larger centres such as Penrith Auction Mart Vaccination Centre operate long days and are open 8am-8pm. Slots are regularly added so if you can't see a slot that suits you please keep trying. It is worth knowing that the National Booking Service is always busy when new cohorts open so it might be worth waiting for a few days for more slots to choose from.

Are the vaccines safe and effective?

Q. Is the vaccine safe?

A. The vaccines have been approved as safe by the MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency). The vaccines have been through 3 phases of clinical trials with thousands of volunteers, with no serious safety concerns. As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process.

Q. The vaccine has been developed very quickly; how can I be sure it hasn't been "rushed through" and that no corners have been cut?

A. The COVID-19 response has seen unprecedented resources, collaboration and funding for a vaccine search.

The vaccines went through all the normal stages of development and approval. It happened more quickly because of several reasons including:

- There had already been vaccine work on other coronaviruses
- There was no waiting for funding
- Development stages were run in parallel

This video explains how COVID-19 vaccines were developed quickly: <https://youtu.be/ddDiyIKUP0M>

You can also find a video from the MHRA here: <https://youtu.be/3HPpWelo1ro>

The NHS will offer a COVID-19 vaccination only when it has been approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), the official UK regulator, like all other medicines and devices.

Q. Does the vaccine work? Some people have had the vaccine and still got COVID-19.

A. The vaccine takes around 14 days to become effective, you may still catch coronavirus in that time. Additionally, no vaccine is 100% effective so some people will test positive later, however, even in this instance the vaccine should reduce the severity of the infection.

Q. Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?

A. No. Vaccines are developed by taking parts of the virus itself. The parts of the virus in the vaccine cannot reproduce in your body and cannot give you coronavirus.

Q. Is it likely my two doses will be of the same vaccine and is it safe if they're not?

A. At this stage the expectation is that people will be given two doses of the **same** vaccine. It is possible that if there are supply issues with one of the vaccines people may be given two doses of different vaccines. As the vaccines work in a similar way (to boost the production of the spike protein) it is likely that this would stimulate the same / a similar booster response.

Q. Are clinicians being paid by vaccine companies or vested interests to vaccinate people?

A. No. NHS staff are being paid for their time to vaccinate people as part of their usual NHS contracts. The regulatory bodies that have approved the vaccine are fully independent. They are not paid by vaccine companies or other vested interests.

Should I have the vaccination?

Q. Do younger adults need to have the vaccination as coronavirus is less serious for them?

A. Whilst coronavirus is more serious on average for older people it can still be very serious and at times fatal for younger people. We are also finding people of all ages and levels of fitness can be impacted by long term effects of coronavirus (long covid).

It is a personal choice, but the more people who have had the vaccine, the safer it makes it for people who are vulnerable. Having the vaccine reduces the chance of you becoming seriously ill with Coronavirus, and reduces the chances of you passing it on to others.

Q. Can you have the vaccine if you have any underlying health problems?

A. The vaccine was found to be safe in people with various health conditions but if you are concerned it is always best to discuss this with your GP beforehand. People with chronic health conditions are often at increased risk of developing complications of COVID-19. They need the vaccine more than most.

Q. I've got allergies, can I still have the vaccine?

A. It is advised if you have had a severe reaction called anaphylaxis you should talk to a clinician before having the vaccine. It is likely that you will be advised it is safe to have the vaccine, unless you are allergic to one its ingredients.

There is lots of good information on the Anaphylaxis Campaign website:

<https://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/covid-19-advice/pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-and-allergies/>

Q. Why aren't children and young people being offered the vaccine now they're back at school?

A. There are trials looking at the impact of the vaccine on children and young people which will guide future plans. At the moment people under the age of 18 aren't being routinely vaccinated for coronavirus unless they have clinical reasons or are working in frontline health and care services.

Q. We'll soon have reached herd immunity, I don't really need to have it. It won't make a difference if I do or don't?

A. We are still some way off from that level of vaccine coverage. Whilst coronavirus is more serious on average for older people it can still be very serious and at times fatal for younger people. We are also finding people of all ages and levels of fitness can be impacted by long term effects of coronavirus (long covid). As well as your personal health, having the vaccine is likely to reduce the risk to others and higher vaccination rates (in time) will support loosening of lockdown restrictions.

Q. The protection from the vaccine might not last very long, can I wait and have it if rates rise again?

A. The more people who have had the vaccine the safer it makes it for people who are vulnerable. It reduces the chance of you becoming seriously ill and reduces the chances of you passing it on. You can also use Lateral Flow Tests to monitor your status and if you suspect you have covid you should self-isolate and book a PCR test if you develop symptoms. And we should all continue to follow the guidance about social distancing (Hands, Face, Space)?

Q. I have already had Coronavirus. Should I still have the vaccine?

A. Yes. Experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from coronavirus. Some people have had coronavirus more than once. The vaccine gives you the maximum protection and will greatly reduce the chances of having a second infection. You are advised to wait 4 weeks from the start of your symptoms (or positive test) before having your vaccination.

COVID-19 Vaccination and pregnancy

This section gives very brief answers to the most common questions on coronavirus vaccination and pregnancy. You can find far more detailed information here: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-womens-health/covid-19-vaccines-and-pregnancy/covid-19-vaccines-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding/>

Q: I'm pregnant, can I have a COVID-19 vaccination?

A: Yes. The latest advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is that COVID-19 vaccines should be offered to pregnant women at the same time as the rest of the population, based on their age and clinical risk group.

If you are pregnant and have been offered a Covid-19 vaccine, the decision whether to have the vaccination is your choice; if you're unsure, you can discuss the benefits and risks of having the vaccine with your midwife or doctor before deciding.

Even once you've had your vaccination, if you're working, your employer should carry out a risk assessment to make sure it is safe for you to continue working. This risk assessment should follow the rules set out in this government guidance: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/risk-assessment.htm>

Q: I'm breastfeeding, can I have a COVID-19 vaccination?

A: Yes, women who are breastfeeding are advised to receive the vaccine when eligible to do so.

Q: I'm hoping to have a baby in the future, should I have a COVID-19 vaccination?

A: Women trying to become pregnant do not need to avoid pregnancy after vaccination and there is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 vaccines will affect future fertility (in men or women).

What are the side effects?

Q. What side effects can I expect?

A. Most side effects are mild or moderate and go away within a few days of appearing. If side effects such as pain and/or fever are troublesome, they can be treated by medicines for pain and fever such as paracetamol. The common side effects are: pain at injection site, (ie, a sore arm) tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain and fever.

Rarely the vaccine may give rise to an allergic reaction. All staff giving vaccines have been trained to treat this.

There is some evidence of a very slight increase in the risk of blood clots with the Oxford Astra Zeneca, and the advice is that those aged under 40 should have a different vaccine where possible.

There is more detail about the Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine and blood clots on the next page.

Q. My friend had a really bad reaction to their COVID-19 vaccination, will that happen to me too?

A. There doesn't seem to be any obvious pattern to who suffers from side effects and who doesn't. Many people suffer no side effects, or only very mild side effects such as a sore arm.

Q. I suffered bad side effects after the first dose, do I really have to have the second dose?

A. It is your choice whether to have the vaccine and you could choose not to have a second dose. However, whilst one dose does give you significant protection a second dose will give you the maximum protection for the longest time possible. There may be the need for booster doses in the future. We would encourage you to have the second dose; many people find the side effects are milder following the second dose.

Q. How am I going to look after my children if I get severe side effects?

A. As you would if you picked up any other illnesses - you may want to plan for a quiet day, and prepare, for example by having an easy meal in the fridge for that evening.

Q. Can you guarantee no rare adverse reactions or reactions that occur later on?

A. Each of the vaccines have been tested on over 10,000 people and now have been given to millions of people as part of the vaccination campaign. The risk of any rare or late outcome is far outweighed by the risks of the disease.

Q. Can the Astra Zeneca vaccine cause blood clots?

A. Recently there have been reports of an extremely rare but serious condition involving blood clots and unusual bleeding after AstraZeneca (AZ) vaccination. Some people with this condition have suffered life changing effects and some have died. These cases are being carefully reviewed but the risk factors for this condition are not yet clear.

Although this condition remains extremely rare there is a higher risk in people after the first dose of the AZ vaccine. To date and overall, just over 10 people develop this condition for every million doses of AZ vaccine given. This is seen more often in younger people and tends to occur between 4 days and 4 weeks following vaccination.

Similar conditions can also occur naturally, and clotting problems are a common complication of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection. An increased risk has not yet been seen after other COVID-19 vaccines in the UK.

This means that younger people (those under 40) are being advised to have a COVID-19 vaccine other than the AZ vaccine where possible – i.e. the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. The exact advice varies by age group and other factors; you can check full advice on these links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-and-blood-clotting>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/977653/PHE_COVID-19_AZ_vaccination_guide.pdf

Anyone, regardless of their age, should call 111 immediately if they develop any of these symptoms between 4 days to 4 weeks after being vaccinated:

- a severe headache that is not relieved with painkillers or is getting worse
- a headache that feels worse when you lie down or bend over
- a headache that's unusual for you and occurs with blurred vision, feeling or being sick, problems speaking, weakness, drowsiness or seizures (fits)
- a rash that looks like small bruises or bleeding under the skin
- shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling or persistent abdominal (tummy) pain

What's in the vaccine?

Q. Do the Pfizer/BioNTech, Oxford/AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines contain blood products?

A. No, none of the 3 vaccines contain blood products.

Q. Do any of the vaccines contain materials from abortions

A. None of the vaccines contain any materials from abortions.

[The virus used in the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is grown on cells derived from a single legal termination carried out in 1972. None of these cells are part of the final vaccine. The Vatican and the British Islamic Medical Association have said that, if this is the only vaccine offered to an individual, it is morally acceptable]

Q. Do the vaccines contain Aluminium?

A. No, none of the three vaccines approved for use in the UK contain aluminium.

Q. Are the vaccines vegan?

A. Yes. They do **not** contain animal products.

[The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is based on a “chimpanzee adenovirus” – this has caused some confusion, so it's worth knowing that this is a version of the common cold virus that normally infects chimpanzees (and has been modified to produce the COVID-19 vaccine). The vaccine doesn't contain any cells or other material from chimpanzees themselves]

Q. Could the vaccine affect my genes?

A. The vaccine does not alter your DNA or genes. The vaccine only gets you to produce an immune response.

[The mRNA in the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines is a similar type of molecule to DNA, but it is only present in your body for a short time, and does not alter your DNA]

What can I do after I've been vaccinated?

Q. Do I still need to following social distancing guidance (Hands, Face, Space) after my vaccination?

A. Yes. You still need to follow all the restrictions and guidance that is in place. It takes a few weeks for the vaccine to become effective, and even then, protection isn't always perfect. Unfortunately, for now, we all need to keep following the rules for a little longer to protect ourselves and those around us.

Q. Should I still do Lateral Flow Tests once I have been vaccinated?

A. Yes – you should be protected from severe coronavirus, but you could still catch it and pass it on without knowing it. Around 1 in 3 people who are infected with coronavirus have no symptoms.

Lateral Flow Testing is now available to everyone. These are rapid coronavirus tests, designed to be used regularly (twice a week) by people who don't have any coronavirus symptoms.

You can collect test kits to use at home from any pharmacy, and from a number of other locations across Cumbria – you can search for your nearest site here: <https://maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/>

You can also use one of the 12 community testing sites across Cumbria; the staff at these sites can help you to learn how to do a lateral flow test, and then provide you with test kits to use at home. You can find more information on testing, including the locations and opening times of the community test sites on the Cumbria County Council website: <https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/coronavirus/communitytestingsites.asp>

Lateral flow tests detect many coronavirus infections, but not all – so whilst getting a negative test result reduces the risk that you'll infect other people, you should still follow all the rules around social distancing, etc.

Q: I've had my vaccination, but now I've got coronavirus symptoms. Do I need to get tested?

A. Yes. Although the vaccine gives a high degree of protection against coronavirus infection, and greatly reduces the chances you'll suffer severe coronavirus symptoms, some people do still get infected after they've had their vaccination.

If you develop any of the 3 main coronavirus symptoms, you should self-isolate (along with other members of your household) and book a PCR test.

You can book a PCR test here: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test-or-by-calling-119>.

The 3 main symptoms of coronavirus are:

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

What can I expect in the future?

Q. Will vaccine status be required for overseas travel?

A. We don't know. This will generally be down to individual countries' and travel companies' policies (e.g. like Yellow Fever in some Latin America countries). Qantas (Australian airline) has stated COVID-19 vaccinations will be mandatory before long haul travel.

Q. Is yearly vaccination necessary?

A. At this stage we do not know the answer to that question, it is possible that further doses will be needed to maintain protection or to protect against a new variant of coronavirus. There is already some national planning underway for booster doses in the autumn if necessary.

Q. Are there increased side effects from yearly vaccinations?

A. We don't know whether coronavirus will require an annual vaccination (see above). However, for the annual vaccinations that are in use such as flu there is no evidence that yearly vaccines have an increased risk of adverse side effects.