

## **Winter Vaccines – FAQs – November 2021**

### **Why is it so important that I receive both vaccines this year?**

It's more important than ever that you receive the flu vaccination this year to protect yourself and those around you.

On average, more than 11,000 people die each year from flu. Health experts have warned we could have a bad flu season, alongside rising cases of Covid-19. This is because, due to Covid-19 restrictions put in place last year, people may be less immune to the flu virus this year.

Flu and Covid-19 can both be life-threatening and spread more easily in winter when we are more likely to be indoors or in crowded spaces.

Even if you're healthy, you can still catch Covid-19 or flu and spread it to the people you care for. Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself and those around you.

It is vital that you maintain protection against severe illness from Covid-19 and flu this winter, specifically hospitalisation and deaths. The aim is to protect those who are most vulnerable and to protect the NHS.

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

Yes. The NHS would not offer any vaccinations to the public until it is safe to do so. The MHRA, the official UK regulator authorising licensed use of medicines and vaccines by healthcare professionals, has said these vaccines are safe and highly effective, and we have full confidence in their expert judgement and processes.

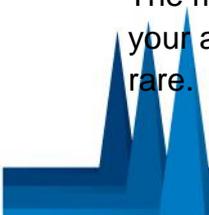
### **How effective is the flu vaccine?**

The flu vaccine will help prevent you getting the flu and is your best protection against the virus. It will not stop all flu viruses but if you do get the flu after vaccination, it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been. It takes the immune response about two weeks to fully develop after vaccination.

### **Will I get any side effects from the flu vaccine?**

The most common side effects from the flu vaccine can be a slight temperature or your arm may feel a little sore where you had the injection. Other side effects are rare.

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## **Can I have the flu vaccine if I'm pregnant or breastfeeding?**

Pregnancy alters how the body handles infections such as flu. So, you should have the flu vaccine if you're pregnant to help protect you and your baby. It's safe to have the flu vaccine at any stage of pregnancy, from conception onwards. It's also safe for women who are breastfeeding to have the vaccine.

## **Who should not have the flu vaccine?**

Most adults can have the flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you have had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past.

You may be at risk of an allergic reaction to the flu vaccine injection if you have an egg allergy. This is because some flu vaccines are made using eggs. Ask your GP practice or pharmacy for information on getting a low-egg or egg-free vaccine.

If you're ill with a high temperature, it's best to wait until you're better before having the flu vaccine.

## **I had the flu vaccination last year. Do I need to have it again?**

Yes. The viruses that cause flu can change every year, which means the flu (and the vaccine) this year may be different from last year.

## **Do I still need to get my flu jab if I've had both of my Covid-19 vaccines?**

Yes, the Covid-19 vaccine does not protect you from the flu, and vice versa.

## **I've recently had Covid-19, can I still have my flu vaccine?**

If you've had Covid-19, it's still safe to have the flu vaccine. It will still be effective at helping to prevent flu.

## **Can the flu vaccine cause flu?**

There are several types of injected flu vaccine. None of them contain live viruses so they cannot give you flu.

## **How effective is the Covid-19 vaccine?**

The Covid-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering from Covid-19. The Covid-19 vaccines have saved more than 100,000 lives and significantly reduced hospitalisations from Covid-19.

With both flu and Covid-19 expected to be circulating this winter, it's important to boost your immunity and help protect yourself and others.

## **Can I still catch Covid-19 after having the vaccine?**

The Covid-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering from Covid-19 disease. It may take a few days for your body to build up some protection from the booster.

Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective – some people may still get Covid-19 despite having a vaccination, but this should be less severe.

### **Will there be any side effects from the booster vaccine?**

As with your previous dose the common side effects are the same for all Covid-19 vaccines used in the UK, and include:

- having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection. This tends to be worst around 1 to 2 days after the vaccine
- feeling tired
- headache
- general aches, or mild flu like symptoms

You can rest and take paracetamol (follow the dose advice in the packaging) to help make you feel better. Although feeling feverish is not uncommon for 2 to 3 days, a high temperature is unusual and may indicate you have Covid-19 or another infection.

Although a fever can occur within a day or 2 of vaccination, if you have any other Covid-19 symptoms or your fever lasts longer, stay at home, and arrange to have a test. Symptoms following vaccination normally last less than a week. If your symptoms seem to get worse or if you are concerned, you can call NHS 111.

If you had serious side effects after any previous dose you may be advised to avoid or delay further vaccination. You should discuss this with your doctor or specialist.

### **Are there any serious side effects to having the Covid-19 vaccine?**

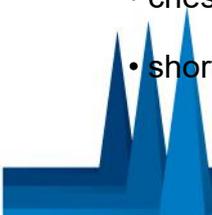
Worldwide, there have also been recent, very rare cases of inflammation of the heart called myocarditis or pericarditis reported after Pfizer and Moderna Covid-19 vaccines.

These cases have been seen mostly in younger men within several days after vaccination. Most of these people recovered and felt better following rest and simple treatments.

You should seek medical advice urgently if, after vaccination, you experience:

- chest pain
- shortness of breath

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- feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering, or pounding heart

**I've only just had my first or second Covid-19 vaccine, can I have a booster jab?**

No, the JCVI advises that the booster vaccine should be offered no earlier than six months after completion of the primary vaccine course.

**What type of vaccine will the Covid-19 booster be? What if it's different to the one I have had?**

You will be given a booster dose of either Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. AstraZeneca may be an option if this is the vaccine that you had for the first two doses.

These vaccines have already been given to millions of people in the UK. You will be offered the right vaccine for you which may be the same or different from the vaccines that you had before.

**Can I have the booster if I haven't completed the first vaccination course?**

No, you need to finish the first course of your vaccination.

**I haven't yet had the Covid-19 vaccination, can I still get my first jabs?**

Everyone that is eligible that hasn't already had their first or second Covid-19 vaccination will still be able to get vaccinated, even when the Covid-19 booster programme begins.

Everyone aged 18 and over can book their initial Covid-19 vaccination through the NHS booking service (call 119 free of charge, anytime between 7am and 11pm seven days a week).

**What is the difference between a booster vaccine and a 3rd dose of the primary course?**

The JCVI has issued guidance recommending a 3rd dose of the Covid-19 vaccine as part of the primary course of vaccination for people who are severely immunosuppressed. This includes people with a severely weakened immune system due to treatments for conditions such as cancer or for those with long-term chronic conditions where their immunity is affected by medication.

A primary 3rd dose is not the booster vaccine. It is recommended that it should be given at least 8 weeks after the 2nd dose and is part of the primary course of immunisation. A booster jab is also expected to be offered 6 months after the 3rd dose, but we are currently awaiting JCVI guidance on this.

**Can I have the Covid-19 booster if I'm pregnant or breastfeeding?**

Yes. Vaccination remains the best way to protect against the known risks of Covid-19 in pregnancy for both mother and baby, including admission to intensive care and premature birth.

According to the latest figures, the number of pregnant women being admitted to hospital with Covid-19 is increasing, and many who are requiring care are experiencing serious symptoms. Among the pregnant women hospitalised with the virus between May and July, 98% were unvaccinated.

This is a stark reminder that vaccines save lives – and it's why we're urging pregnant women to take action to protect themselves and their babies.

If you have any questions you can discuss having the booster with your GP practice or maternity team. For more information, the UK Health Security Agency (formerly Public Health England) has produced a helpful guide to Covid-19 vaccination for all women of childbearing age. This is available on their website.

The Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and the Royal College of Midwives have also produced information to help you make an informed choice about getting vaccinated.

### **Can I try for a baby after being vaccinated?**

If you are trying to conceive, this should not affect your decision about vaccination. There is no evidence that the vaccines cause problems with fertility, or that they will cause any problems for women wanting to become pregnant now or in the future.

### **I've already had Covid-19, why do I need a booster?**

Getting vaccinated is just as important for those who have already had Covid-19 as it is for those who haven't.

As with all new viruses, we don't know how long those who have recovered from Covid-19 are immune for, or the level of their immunity. Being vaccinated will help protect you from becoming seriously ill from Covid-19 in the future, so you can continue to be there for your family, friends, and patients.

### **Is there anyone who shouldn't have a Covid-19 booster?**

There are very few people who should not have a booster.

If you have had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine you should discuss this with your doctor.

