

COVID-19 vaccine: FAQs

Who is included in the initial vaccine roll-out?

The initial roll-out is for all border and MIQ workers covered by the current Required Testing Order (2020) and those they live with – ‘household contacts’.

This applies to all workers currently undergoing mandatory COVID-19 testing as part of their work. These workers are considered to be the people most at risk of exposure to COVID-19 on a daily basis so we need to protect them and those they live with as a priority.

When will I find out more about the details of getting vaccinated?

Detailed information on vaccination locations, when you are likely to get your vaccination and how to arrange your vaccination will be finalised soon and we will let you know.

Once vaccinated, will I still need to be tested?

Yes. The data is clear that the vaccines protect individuals from the effects of the virus, however it is still too early for researchers to determine whether a vaccinated person could still transmit the virus to someone else. While this remains unclear, we need to assume there is still a risk of transmission. This means the mandatory testing of our border and MIQ workforce needs to continue.

Do I need to be vigilant about hygiene after I'm vaccinated?

It is also an important reminder that the vaccines are not a substitute for good hygiene practices of

washing hands, coughing and sneezing into your elbow, wearing masks or face coverings and other precautions, including PPE.

Does the vaccine prevent me from transmitting the virus to others?

We don't know at this stage. We do know that being vaccinated does not remove the need for PPE, regular testing and continuing with other precautions.

Who is a 'household contact'?

This means anyone who usually lives with you, whether they're related to you or not. It also includes people who live with you part-time. This covers papakāinga as well.

When will my household contacts get vaccinated?

Household contacts will be vaccinated as part of the initial roll-out, after border and MIQ workers have had their first dose.

How will my household contacts be contacted to arrange their vaccination?

It is important we get this process right. We are close to finalising how we will contact your household contacts to ensure they get the information they'll need to arrange their vaccinations. We will let you know as soon as we can.

Is the vaccine safe?

There's never been this level of global collaboration amongst scientists and governments in vaccine development – and that

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has improved the speed of its development and the launch of clinical trials around the world.

We are moving swiftly but without taking any short cuts or compromising safety.

Vaccine companies have been sharing their data all over the world, which has sped up the research process and led to a number of innovations, such as the use of the messenger RNA technology.

The agencies that regulate vaccines, like New Zealand's Medsafe, have been able to start assessing the clinical trial data much sooner than they normally would. Large manufacturing plants have been developed, enabling vaccines to be produced more swiftly and on a larger scale than previously possible.

We will also continue to receive data from large, ongoing clinical trials, enabling us to monitor the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines right through the initial roll-out and into their ongoing use.

All these changes mean that safety approvals that used to take a long time have happened faster. There have been no shortcuts.

Is the vaccine effective against new strains of the virus?

The Ministry of Health is evaluating preliminary data from other countries about the impact new strains may have on vaccine effectiveness. Some companies have indicated they may make changes to the vaccine to ensure they work properly – this is similar to the regular changes made to the influenza vaccine.

How do the vaccines work?

Vaccines work by teaching the body's immune system to respond quickly to infection without being exposed to the infection itself.

Traditionally, most vaccines work by introducing modified versions, or bits of the virus, to the immune system, prompting the body's immune system to respond by making protective antibodies so that when you come across the real infection your body is prepared to fight it off.

Some of the COVID-19 vaccines, such as the Pfizer vaccine, use a different approach. These are known as 'messenger RNA' vaccines. These vaccines don't use virus cells at all – instead they contain a piece of RNA code that essentially teaches your body to recognise the virus, so it can respond straight away if you get infected.

Each vaccine is slightly different and has its own characteristics. Specific information about each vaccine will be made available as Medsafe completes its approval processes.

Will I have a choice of which vaccine I receive?

No. The four vaccines New Zealand has secured are going through the approval process at different times. The Pfizer vaccine is the only current vaccine that has been approved by Medsafe as being safe and effective for use in New Zealand.