

Community Pharmacy Living Well Campaign



Vaccines campaign – information factsheet for pharmacy staff

This Living Well campaign aims to promote the importance of vaccines and how, next to clean water, they are our best protection from serious diseases and illness.

There has been widespread coverage of the government's announcement regarding a vaccine for the coronavirus pandemic being approved and beginning roll-out from December 2020.

The campaign will therefore be in two phases:

Phase 1: To provide the public with information about the importance of vaccines generally and how they protect us from serious diseases and illness.

Phase 2: To provide the public with information about approved COVID-19 vaccine(s), the roll out of the vaccination programme and further information when it becomes available.

Living Well is key to engagement on this subject as many people will go to their local community pharmacy when seeking credible health information.

COVID-19 vaccine – FAQs

Q: What is a vaccine?

A: Vaccines help prevent disease. They work by stimulating your body's immune system to make antibodies, which are proteins that help fight infection – like it would if you had the virus. After getting vaccinated, you are less likely to get the disease, and if you do get the disease, your symptoms are likely to be less severe.

Q: I don't know anyone who's had COVID-19, do we really need a vaccine?

A: The number of people worldwide who have died with COVID-19 has passed one million and many places are still reporting growing numbers of new infections.

In Northern Ireland, there have been many deaths and many people have been hospitalised or suffer with ongoing health problems due to COVID-19.

People continue to get infected, and once the virus starts to spread, it can do so rapidly. Even if you, your family or friends haven't experienced it first hand, that doesn't mean it isn't a threat. Protect your family and others. Being vaccinated will help to protect you and reduce the spread of this deadly virus.

(FAQs continued overleaf)

COVID-19 vaccine – FAQs (continued)

Q: I've heard that there are treatments for COVID-19 so why do we still need a vaccine?

A: There are some treatments that have been proven to make a difference, for example the antiviral drug remdesivir can reduce the length of illness. Two steroid drugs have been shown to save lives but only in people who are seriously ill in hospital. These drugs mainly treat some of the symptoms of the disease and are not a cure.

It would be better to prevent the illness, rather than get it and treat it. A vaccine can help prevent you getting symptoms and help prevent it from spreading.

Q: How do the vaccines work?

A: You will need two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, around three to four weeks apart, as injections into the upper arm. At least seven days after receiving the second dose of the vaccine, your body will start to make antibodies, which are proteins that help your immune system fight infection so that if you are exposed to the virus your body will be able to fight it.

Q: How effective are the vaccines at preventing COVID-19?

A: The trials that have been carried out show that the vaccines are potentially 90% effective at preventing the disease in those who get the vaccine. This means that out of 100 people who get the vaccine, 90 people will not get symptoms of the disease. This will have a huge impact on the number of people being hospitalised and dying with COVID-19. If you do develop symptoms of COVID-19, they will likely be milder if you've had the vaccine.

Q: I've heard that the COVID-19 vaccines haven't been thoroughly tested, so how do I know they are safe?

A: The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA), the independent regulator in the UK, would not approve the vaccines for use unless they are safe. The vaccines have been through three stages of trials, involving thousands of people, and further larger studies are still being carried out. The results show that the vaccine is safe. The risk to you of getting COVID-19 and dying of complications is much greater than any risk associated with the vaccine.

Q: How can I trust a vaccine that's been rushed through?

A: The safety checks of the vaccines have not been rushed through. The length of the trials has not been shortened, and the usual safety measures remain in place and high standards must still be met.

The technology behind the vaccines has been in development for a long time. It is the funding, recruitment, administration, manufacturing and approval processes that have been sped up so that we can offer the best protection from the virus in a public health emergency.

Q: What are the side effects of the vaccines?

A: As with all medicines, side effects can occur after getting a vaccine. However, these are usually very minor and don't last long. Very common side effects include:

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

To date, there have been no reports of severe reactions, hospitalisations or deaths due to the COVID-19 vaccines.

It is possible that rarer effects could emerge over time, when millions of people are immunised, but this is true of every vaccine that has ever been developed and the MHRA will be constantly monitoring the safety of the vaccines.

The risk to you of getting COVID-19 and dying of complications is much greater than any risk associated with the vaccine.

Q: Do the vaccines contain animal products that are not vegan, Kosher or Halal?

A: A list of ingredients of the vaccine (s) will be made available to you, then you can make an informed decision.

Q: Is there anyone who should not get vaccinated?

A: If you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine before, please discuss with your healthcare provider such as your community pharmacist before attending for vaccination. Also, if you have a condition that affects your immune system, the vaccine may not be suitable for you. You should not receive the vaccine if you are under 16 years of age, pregnant, breastfeeding or reporting hypersensitivity to ingredients as detailed on the vaccine. Ask your healthcare provider for advice. Your healthcare provider will be fully informed of vaccine characteristics, effectiveness and risks and can help reassure you about safety to make an informed decision.

Q: Who will get the vaccines first?

A: The Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) - experts who advise the government on vaccines - recommends that the vaccines are offered to groups at highest risk first. When more vaccines become available, then they will be offered more widely.

Q: I'm fit and healthy, do I still need a vaccine?

A: Yes, the virus can affect anyone and by getting a vaccine you're protecting yourself and others around you.

Q: I've already had COVID-19, do I still need to get a vaccine?

A: Yes. A vaccine may give you protection for longer than any natural immunity provided by recovering from the virus.

Q: Are there enough supplies of the vaccines to go around?

A: In Northern Ireland, we have secured enough supplies to start vaccinating our most at risk groups, and when more vaccines become available they will be offered to other groups of people as recommended by the JCVI.

Q: Will I need to get the vaccine again next year?

A: It is not yet known how long the vaccine will protect you for but early results suggest that protection falls over time. This means it is likely that you will need the vaccine again at some point in the future.

Q: Will a vaccine be free of charge?

A: The vaccine will be provided free of charge. It may take a while to get to all the eligible groups, but, when you are invited, make sure you get yours.

Q: I have contact with people in eligible groups, should I let them know a vaccine is coming?

A: If you're a doctor, community pharmacist, nurse, care worker or in a patient-facing role, as well as being likely to be prioritised for vaccination, you have an important role in offering information on vaccines to others. People will ask you for reassurance that vaccines work and are safe. As well as the information in this document, please share the trusted information on the individual vaccines when available.

Q: Will other measures (social distancing/ face coverings/lockdowns) still apply to me even if I've had the vaccine?

A: Yes. A vaccine will help in getting life back to normal again but it will take some time before the wider community is protected. In the meantime, you should still act to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the community and stick to the regulations – please continue to wash your hands, wear a face covering in indoor public spaces and try to keep a 2 metre / 6 feet distance from other people.

Social media and digital assets

A number of social media assets will be available to support the vaccines campaign and will be available to view and download from: www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3035.htm

For pharmacies using social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram to engage with customers there is an opportunity to let customers know the pharmacy is involved in the campaign and promote the campaign messages. Please tag the Public Health Agency, Health and Social Care Board and Community Pharmacy NI in your posts and follow our social media accounts:

Twitter:

@publichealthni;
@HSCBoard;
@compharmacyni

Facebook:

@publichealthagency;
@healthandsocialcareboard;
@communitypharmacyni

Instagram:

@publichealthni;
@health_and_social_care;
@compharmacyni

Online training

As the flu vaccination programme continues to run pharmacy staff may also be interested in the recent online training provided by the Northern Ireland Centre for Pharmacy Learning and Development (NICPLD). A recorded lecture, 'Understanding influenza', is available on the website covering the flu vaccine and its mode of action and practicalities associated with delivery. Visit www.nicpld.org to find out more.

The following link also provides information on the PHA's flu campaign, 'Just the flu?': www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/seasonal-flu-vaccination-public-information-campaign-newsletter