Vaccine booster doses

What is a Covid-19 vaccine booster?

A Covid-19 booster is an additional dose of the vaccine, which is given after the protection provided by the initial vaccine has begun to decrease. The objective of a booster dose is to restore vaccine effectiveness.

Why do I need a booster?

The booster vaccine boosts the protective effect of the initial vaccine dose. It increases your immunity and significantly reduces your chances of getting severe Covid-19, which may lead to hospitalisation and possibly death. The booster dosage offers protection against new variants, including Omicron. It is especially important to get the booster, if you are over 60 or if you have comorbidities.

Is it safe to get the booster vaccine if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

The Covid-19 vaccines and boosters have been shown to be safe in all trimesters of pregnancy. It is important to get a booster dose so that you and your baby can stay protected throughout your pregnancy and after.

Getting your booster vaccine while breastfeeding will also help protect your baby against Covid-19.

Will I experience side effects after receiving the booster vaccine?

You might experience some symptoms such as a fever, body aches, headaches, and tiredness. These temporary symptoms do not mean you are sick – they signal that your immune system is responding to the vaccine and building up protection against the coronavirus.

When do I qualify for the booster shot?

If you received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, you can get the first booster dose after two months. You are also eligible for an additional booster dose three months after the first booster dose.

If you received two Pfizer vaccines, you can get the booster dose three months after the second dose.

You can choose either a Johnson & Johnson or a Pfizer vaccine as your booster dose.

I'm not registered to get vaccinated. Can I still get vaccinated?

Yes, the staff at the vaccination site will register you on the national vaccination database and then you can get vaccinated

I don't have any identity documents. Can I still get the booster shot?

Yes, you can go still go for your booster if you don't have identity documents. The staff at the vaccination site will register and assist you.

I haven't received my first vaccine yet. Can I still get it?

Yes, you can go to the nearest vaccination site for your vaccine.

Making progress possible. Together.

I went for my first Pfizer vaccine but did not return for the second dose. Can I still go for the second dose?

Yes, you can still go for your second dose at the nearest vaccination site.

Can I have the booster dose if I am feeling sick or have Covid-19?

It is not recommended that you get your booster dose if you are feeling sick, or if you have recently tested positive for Covid-19.

If you are eligible for your booster but have contracted Covid-19, you can receiver your booster 30 days after you have recovered.

If I get a booster, do I still need a flu vaccine?

The Covid-19 vaccine does not replace the annual flu vaccine. You can have your flu vaccine at the same time as the Covid-19 vaccine/booster dose.

Will I have to continue wearing a mask once I get a booster?

Boosting and masking up is the key to protecting yourself and those around you. By working together, we can boost our protection and keep each other safe.

General

What is a vaccine?

Vaccines protect us against serious infections and diseases. A vaccine primes the immune system (your body's soldiers) to recognize and fight disease. It does this by triggering the production of antibodies – special proteins which your white blood cells (soldier cells) use to fight pathogens (Pathogens: collective name for something that causes disease, such as viruses, parasites, bacteria and fungi). By doing this, it teaches your immune system to recognize the infection and fight it off in future.

What is the difference between a vaccine and a cure for a disease?

Vaccines are designed to prevent disease. They prepare your body's immune system to fight off infections so you don't get sick in the first place.

Treatments cure diseases. They help sick patients survive, lessen the severity of symptoms and allow you to recover faster.

Who ensures that vaccines are safe to use?

The pharmaceutical companies that create vaccines conduct laboratory studies and clinical trials to make sure that vaccines are safe to use. These are standardised procedures which start with laboratory studies and end with big clinical (in person) trials with thousands of people.

The information is published in peer-reviewed journals, which means other experts not employed by the pharmaceutical companies check the thoroughness of the work. After this, once the vaccine is found to be effective, this information is given to the regulatory bodies in each country, who will go through it to see if there are any safety concerns during an approval process. In this way they can make sure the vaccines are safe and effective before administering them to the public.

In our country, the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority monitors, evaluates, investigates, inspects and registers all health products.

Are the Covid-19 vaccines Halaal?

Yes, the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) and the Pfizer/BioNtech vaccines were declared Halaal by Jamiatul Ulama South Africa.

This is due to the formulation and advice received by the Islamic Medical Association, as well as other professionals and stakeholders.

Is the Covid-19 vaccine ethical for Christians?

Yes. The vaccine is not anti-Christ or satanic. Christian faith leaders and other religious groups support taking Covid-19 vaccines.

Be wary of church groups looking to exploit you by offering protection for tithes.

Vaccine safety and efficacy

Are the vaccines safe?

Yes.

How do you know?

The Covid-19 vaccines were widely tested by expert researchers and were found to be safe for use. More than 1,84 billion people worldwide have already been safely fully vaccinated. That's nearly 1 in every 4 people on earth.

Were the Covid-19 vaccines rushed?

Researchers did not start from scratch when they started researching the Covid-19 vaccine.

SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes Covid-19) is part of the coronavirus family. There are many different coronaviruses and researchers have been studying the coronavirus family of viruses for years and shared the data they had been collecting with other scientists to find a safe and effective solution in the shortest amount of time.

The vaccines were produced and tested at a rapid rate, but all safety and efficacy checks were adhered to. Support through funding and collaboration were the main drivers of the rapid progress, not skipping any safety checks.

What vaccines are currently available?

Globally, there are several vaccines that are in use, and many more in various phases of development. Some vaccines require a single dose, while others require two doses.

In South Africa, we are currently administering the Johnson & Johnson (single dose) and the Pfizer/BioNtech (two doses) vaccines.

Can I take the vaccine if I'm pregnant or breastfeeding?

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, please discuss your options with your healthcare provider.

Getting vaccinated

Is Covid-19 like the flu?

No. Although they are both contagious illnesses that can affect your lungs and breathing, they are caused by different viruses.

Why should I get vaccinated against Covid-19?

Vaccines are the most effective health intervention since the provision of safe drinking water. Vaccines have been around for more than 100 years and have lowered the number of deaths due to diseases such as smallpox, measles, polio and others. Globally, deaths due to vaccine preventable illnesses among children under 5 years old have decreased by over 67% over the past 20 years.

Therefore, the Covid-19 vaccine is the strongest tool in our arsenal to end the Covid-19 pandemic. The vaccine will help prevent severe disease and death, as well as hopefully prevent transmission. So, the more people get vaccinated, the more people will be protected against Covid-19.

Is the vaccine used to reduce the population and to track people?

No, the Covid-19 vaccine is not being used to reduce the population and cannot make you sterile. There is no microchip nor any substance in the vaccine that can be used to track or control you.

Will the vaccine change my DNA?

No, the vaccine cannot affect your genetics or DNA. It's just impossible. It's like saying your phone can make you fly.

The vaccine triggers your immune system to make antibodies to fight against Covid-19. The vaccine does not remain in your body but gets broken down and discarded by your body.

How is the Covid-19 vaccine administered and how soon will I be protected?

Depending on the specific vaccine you receive, you will either receive one or two injections in your upper arm.

Your body will need some time to build its immunity against the Covid-19 virus. Protection increases over a few weeks and should be at good levels around two to four weeks after vaccination.

Does the vaccine have side effects?

You may experience brief pain and swelling at the injection site. The day after the vaccination you may experience chills, fever, tiredness and headache.

These side effects generally clear up within five days. This is common and is to be expected, as it shows that the body is responding to the vaccine by building an immune response.

None of the vaccines currently approved have resulted in severe adverse events such as death or severe morbidity.

Vaccines do not interact with your DNA. The Covid-19 vaccine will not give you the virus.

Do I need to stick to the same brand of vaccine if I get a two-shot vaccine?

Yes, the current recommendations are that you receive two doses of the same vaccine.

Do I need to continue with the Covid-19 golden rules after vaccination?

Yes, you will still need to wear your mask, practice social distancing and washing and sanitising your hands. Even though you should be protected from getting severely ill, you may still be able to spread the virus to others if you are asymptomatic.

Do I need the vaccine if I have already had Covid-19?

Yes, you should still be vaccinated. At this stage, studies have shown that the natural immunity your body may gain does not last. The vaccine will simply improve and extend your immunity.

Can I get vaccinated if I currently have Covid-19 symptoms?

If you have tested positive for Covid-19, you should wait until you have recovered and have completed your isolation period.

How long will I be protected? Will I need to get vaccinated annually?

We are currently unsure how long the immunity from the vaccine will last. Current evidence shows the immunity lasts at least a year. If we find that immunity does decrease, you may need a booster vaccine.

Vaccine availability

How is the national government obtaining vaccines?

Government is getting the vaccine through the Covax facility, agreements with pharmaceutical manufacturers and the African Union acquisition task team. They aim to have 67% of the population vaccinated by the end of 2021.

What is Covax?

Covax is a platform that was created to make sure that all countries have access to the Covid-19 vaccine, and helps to accelerate the development and manufacture of Covid-19 vaccines. It is co- led by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations; and the World Health Organisation.

When will I get vaccinated?

Government is planning to vaccinate 67% of South Africa's population by the end of 2021.

The national Department of Health (DOH) vaccination strategy consists of three phases.

Phase 1 is for our healthcare and emergency workers – currently underway.
Phase 2 is for essential workers, those older than 60, and those older than 18 with underlying conditions.
Phase 3 is for all other adults.

Phase 2 and 3 will start as soon as government has secured enough vaccines.

What is the roll-out plan for City staff?

The roll-out will take place as per the national DOH vaccination strategy (stated above).

Is the vaccine compulsory for City staff?

No. However, staff have been advised to make an informed choice after discussing their concerns with a healthcare worker, but vaccination has been recommended for their safety and the safety of everyone around them.