



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Which COVID-19 vaccines are currently available in South Africa?

Currently one mRNA vaccine (Pfizer BioNTech) and one adenovirus vectored vaccine the Johnson & Johnson (J&J)/Janssen are available in South Africa. The Pfizer vaccine requires 2 doses, with the second dose in South Africa scheduled 6 weeks after the initial dose and the J&J is a single, once off vaccine.

2. When are you considered fully vaccinated?

Two weeks after your single dose of J&J or the second (last) dose of Pfizer. This is because it takes about 14 days for your immune system to recognise the vaccine antigen and mount an appropriate immune response to it in the form of neutralising antibodies and T cell responses.

3. How well do these vaccines work?

Very well. Based on clinical trial evidence and real-life effectiveness data, the Pfizer vaccine is 90-95% and the J&J is 70-60% effective at preventing infection, severe infections and hospitalization in those that are fully vaccinated.

4. Can I still get COVID-19 even after getting vaccinated?

Yes. A vaccine *break through infection* (BTI) may happen in a fully vaccinated person who gets infected with SARS-CoV-2. The persons with BTI's usually have milder COVID-19 but they are able to transmit virus to others.

5. Does the vaccine work with the virus variants?

Yes. Both Pfizer and J&J vaccine protect against the current circulating SARS-CoV-2 variants.

6. Who should get the vaccine?

Everyone from 12 years of age upwards can safely get Pfizer mRNA COVID-19 vaccines. This includes pregnant and lactating women, those with chronic diseases, autoimmune diseases (eg rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus etc), inflammatory bowel diseases, immune suppression, for whatever reason, including people on immune suppressive therapies. There are some restrictions to J&J vaccines, as they have not been approved for those < 18 years yet.

7. Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe?

Yes, these vaccines are as safe as other vaccines that we use routinely. The technology used to make these vaccines has been developed and perfected over many decades. COVID-19 vaccines have gone through a rigorous scientific process to assess safety in trials and safety has been confirmed by the more than 6 billion doses that have been given to date around the world.

8. What are the expected side effects of COVID-19 vaccines?

Like all vaccines, COVID-19 vaccines may cause mild reactions at the injection site (swelling, redness and mild pain). Some people also feel tired, develop a mild fever and get muscle aches, but these are only for 1-2 day.

Severe reactions are *very rare* but have been recorded. With the J&J vaccine 28 cases in 9 million administered doses of a rare clotting disorder (thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome, TTS) have been recorded. This clotting disorder is not seen with the mRNA vaccines like Pfizer.

People with a history of anaphylaxis to other drugs or vaccines must inform the vaccinator of this but anaphylaxis to COVID vaccines is rare and related to specific compounds (polyethylene glycol, PEG) only found in some of the mRNA vaccines.

Rare cases of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the membranes surrounding the heart) have been recorded in some people after their second dose of mRNA vaccines. This condition very rare and it is self-limiting, with no longterm effects.

9. Do COVID-19 vaccines give people COVID?

No. It is impossible for the vaccine to give you COVID-19. There are only fragments of the genetic code of the virus in the vaccine and none of the replication machinery of the virus to allow it to grow.

10. Will COVID-19 vaccines change your DNA?

No. COVID-19 vaccines cannot change your DNA in any way and they cannot get into your DNA. The vaccine works by instructing your immune cells to make the correct immune response to fight off the virus.

11. Is it mandatory to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

No. It is voluntary to get COVID-19 vaccine in South Africa. But getting a vaccine is the only way that people can protect themselves against getting severe COVID which may require hospitalization and lead to severe infections and death.

COVID-19 vaccination is also the only way to ensure that the world may return to normal travel and activities. Many countries are considering making COVID-19 vaccination a requirement to travel to that country and to participate in certain events like going to concerts, movies, restaurants and bars.

12. Does getting the COVID-19 vaccine mean we can stop with masks/hand sanitizers and social distancing?

No. Immunity is not 100% protective after vaccination. Until the entire population is vaccinated there are still risks of getting COVID so mask wearing and social distancing must continue.

13. If I had COVID do I need to get the vaccine?

Yes. There is no additional risks in getting the COVID-19 vaccine for those people that already had COVID-19. Vaccination will add to and further immune protection.

14. How long will immunity with the vaccine last?

There is clear evidence that protection lasts for at least a year maybe more. It is unlikely that the protection will be life-long.