



**Common Questions about  
Coronavirus (COVID-19)  
Vaccines for People Living  
with HIV**

**Building healthier lives**

**UHB is a no smoking Trust**

## Our recommendations

- The Department of Health guidance is clear that people with HIV, regardless of CD4 count, should have a COVID-19 vaccine
- None of the currently available COVID-19 vaccines are live so the vaccines cannot cause COVID-19
- We are recommending all of our patients take the COVID-19 vaccine if it is offered to them
- We also recommend all of our patients have the annual Influenza vaccine if they have not already had it and a one-off PCV-13 pneumococcal vaccine - Both of these can be obtained via your GP

This information for HIV positive patients about COVID-19 vaccination has been adapted from HIV i-Base, the British HIV Association (BHIVA) and other sources below. Dr Steve Taylor from Heartlands HIV Service is a Medical Advisor for HIV i-base. He has reviewed this information. Answers to the questions are correct at the time of writing (13/01/21). The Information is updated regularly. Updates can be found at [i-base.info/qa/16330](http://i-base.info/qa/16330)

# The most commonly asked questions in our clinics

## Are vaccines against COVID-19 effective?

Yes, any approved vaccine has been very carefully studied in a wide range of people.

## Which vaccines are being used in the UK?

The Pfizer vaccine and the Oxford Astra Zeneca (AZ) vaccine are currently being used. The Moderna/NIH vaccine will also soon be used too.

## Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

The main reason to get the vaccine is to protect you from catching COVID-19 which can be a life threatening infection.

## Is my risk high enough to need the vaccine?

There is currently a limited supply of these vaccines. In the UK, for at least the next few months, you will only be offered the vaccine if your personal risk is high. Please wait to be contacted by your GP.

## Do I have to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

If the vaccine is for your own health, then this is always still your choice. You do not have to have the vaccine. Although our clinics at Heartlands HIV service and Queen Elizabeth HIV service are recommending it to all of our patients. If you are still unsure about having the vaccine please talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

## Are vaccines against COVID-19 safe?

Yes, based on the results from large studies, any approved vaccine will be very safe.

## What is the best/ideal interval between vaccine doses?

In the UK both vaccines are now being given with 12 weeks between doses. There is no choice for which vaccine you get or the timing of doses.

## **Will the COVID-19 vaccines work against the new variant viruses?**

Most researchers think the vaccines will still be effective against new variants.

## **What is in the COVID-19 vaccines?**

Maybe it is better to start by saying that none of the COVID vaccines in the UK contain any live viruses. There is no risk of catching coronavirus from the vaccine.

## **Could the vaccine interact with my HIV meds?**

There are no interactions between the COVID-19 vaccines and HIV meds.

## **Does the vaccine interact with other medicines?**

No. There are no medicines that currently cannot be used with the Pfizer, Moderna or Astra Zeneca (Oxford) vaccines.

## **Will my HIV viral load blip when I have the vaccine?**

There are not enough results from HIV positive people in the first vaccine studies to report this yet, though this will be reported later. Based on other vaccines, low-level blips might occur in a small percentage of people just after the vaccine. These will not affect your HIV treatment or your risk to partners.

## **Are animal products in the vaccines? Are they Halal?**

There are no animal products in the Pfizer, Moderna or Oxford vaccines. There are also no traces of pig products or egg products. These vaccines are all Halal safe.

## **What if I have a history of allergy reactions?**

Even people with a history of serious reactions can still use the vaccine. This includes people who have reactions to vaccines, medicines or foods. Please discuss this with your doctor.

## **What about if I have immune suppression from HIV or cancer treatment?**

The vaccine is still recommended if you are HIV positive or if you have cancer. This is because of the high risk from COVID-19.

## **What if I have other inflammatory or autoimmune conditions?**

The vaccine is still recommended for people living with inflammatory or autoimmune conditions. This includes people using immune suppressing drugs.

## **Can people with haemophilia and HIV have COVID-19 vaccines? Are there special cautions?**

Yes, the COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for people with HIV and haemophilia. However, many people will need clotting factor treatment immediately before they have the injection. This is because, although rare, people with haemophilia can develop serious bleeding after an injection into the muscle.

## **Can the vaccine interact with oestrogen and/or testosterone treatment?**

There are no interactions between the COVID-19 vaccines and oestrogen and testosterone.

## **Are the vaccines safe in pregnancy?**

So far there is little data because pregnancy was an exclusion for participation in the main studies. However, if you are pregnant, the vaccine may still be recommended. Please discuss this with your doctor.

## **Are the vaccines safe in children?**

The first vaccine studies were in people who are aged 16 and over. Studies in younger children are currently ongoing.

## **How is the vaccine given?**

The vaccines being used in the UK are given as an injection into your upper arm. The second dose will be given after approximately 12 weeks. Protection

begins from approximately 10–14 days after the first dose and is probably highest 7–14 days after the second dose.

### **What are the side effects from the vaccine?**

Most side effects to the vaccines are mild or moderate. Common side effects are similar to getting the flu vaccine. They generally get better within a few days. They can include:

Mild pain at injection site (common), tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, joint pain (uncommon), fever (uncommon).

### **What if I have already had COVID-19? Does it matter whether this was severe or mild?**

People who already had COVID-19 are still recommended to use the vaccine. It doesn't matter how severe or mild this was.

### **Will my GP or HIV doctor give me the vaccine? Can I choose?**

Who gives you the vaccine might depend on which vaccine is being used. In the UK, it is likely to be your GP. Please wait to be contacted by your GP surgery. In the UK, the vaccine is not currently being given by the HIV clinic.

### **Will the vaccine stop me catching COVID-19? Or just from getting ill? Or maybe both?**

The vaccine will definitely reduce risk of getting ill, but the answer is "probably both". The vaccines are approved because they reduce symptoms of COVID-19.

## **Where can I get more information?**

**The following links are to different sources for more detailed information:**

**i-Base report news about COVID-19 treatment and vaccines in a monthly bulletin**

[i-base.info/htb](http://i-base.info/htb)

## **British HIV Association (for information about HIV and COVID-19)**

[www.bhiva.org/Coronavirus-COVID-19](http://www.bhiva.org/Coronavirus-COVID-19)

## **The Green Immunisation Book on COVID-19**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a)

## **UK patient information leaflet for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine**

[assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/943249/Information\\_for\\_UK\\_recipients.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/943249/Information_for_UK_recipients.pdf) **(PDF)**

## **FDA 50-page document with detailed results on Pfizer vaccine**

[www.fda.gov/media/144245/download](http://www.fda.gov/media/144245/download)

## **YouTube website to watch the US CDC hearings for COVID vaccines**

[www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvrp9iOILTQYiZunwmtiRt52poVP8D02](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvrp9iOILTQYiZunwmtiRt52poVP8D02)

## **A guide to vaccinology: from basic principles to new developments**

[www.nature.com/articles/s41577-020-00479-7](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41577-020-00479-7)

Comprehensive scientific review of safety and efficacy of vaccines published in Nature in December 2020.

## **Article on why vaccine is recommended for people with immune suppression and autoimmune conditions**

[www.medscape.com/viewarticle/942853](http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/942853)

## **Guidance from the US on risk of allergic reactions to mRNA COVID-19 vaccines**

[acaai.org/news/american-college-allergy-asthma-and-immunology-updates-guidance-risk-allergic-reactions-mrna](https://acaai.org/news/american-college-allergy-asthma-and-immunology-updates-guidance-risk-allergic-reactions-mrna)

## **Website for WHO COVAX programme for global access**

[www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax](http://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax)



**Do you really need to go to A&E?**  
Check symptoms online quickly and safely.  
A **free** service for NHS patients.  
**[uhb.nhs.uk/ask](http://uhb.nhs.uk/ask)**

---

### **Queen Elizabeth HIV Service**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham  
Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston  
Birmingham, B15 2GW  
Telephone: 0121 627 2000

### **Birmingham Heartlands HIV Service**

Birmingham Heartlands Hospital  
Bordesley Green East  
Birmingham, B9 5SS  
Telephone: 0121 242 51366  
[www.HIVbirmingham.nhs.uk](http://www.HIVbirmingham.nhs.uk)