

Covid-19 vaccinations for people with chronic kidney disease

The Covid-19 pandemic is the biggest health emergency in living memory. People (mostly adults) with existing health conditions such as chronic kidney disease (CKD) are more vulnerable to getting the virus and are more likely to be seriously ill. This leaflet explains what Covid-19 is and why it is very important to get vaccinated against it.

Covid-19 is a new disease and scientists are discovering more about it all the time. This leaflet is intended as a general overview. For up-to-date information please talk to your healthcare team or visit: www.kidneycareuk.org/coronavirus

What is Covid-19?

Covid-19 is an illness caused by a new type of coronavirus, known as SARS-Cov-2. It was first identified in late 2019 and has spread throughout the world.

Covid-19 is a respiratory disease that is spread through droplets breathed out from your nose or mouth, particularly when speaking or coughing. It can also be picked up by touching your eyes, nose and mouth after contact with contaminated objects and surfaces.

The most common symptoms of Covid-19 are a new continuous cough, a high temperature and a loss of taste or smell. Many people who are infected do not have any symptoms or only have mild symptoms. However, Covid-19 is very infectious and some people can get very ill and need hospitalisation.

There is currently no cure for Covid-19 although new treatments do help to reduce the risk of complications. **The most important and effective way to fight Covid-19 is by mass vaccination.**

What is a vaccine?

A vaccine is a medicine that helps your immune system to fight disease. It is usually given as an injection.

Vaccines are safe, effective and save lives.

Mass vaccination programmes build protection amongst the whole population and can get rid of diseases entirely if enough people are vaccinated. Diseases like smallpox and polio that used to kill or disable millions of people are now gone from the UK because of vaccinations.

The best way out of the global Covid-19 pandemic is to vaccinate as many people as possible.

Is the Covid-19 vaccine safe?

Yes.

As of January 2021 three different Covid-19 vaccines have been approved by the UK government. They are known by the names of companies who made them - Pfizer BioNTech, Oxford Astra Zeneca and Moderna. All of the vaccines have passed extensive safety tests by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), been tested on thousands of people across the

world and proven to be very effective at protecting against Covid-19. **Millions of people have already safely received a Covid-19 vaccine in the UK.**

Which is the best vaccine for me to take?

The best vaccine is the one you are offered first. All of the vaccines being rolled out in the UK are suitable for adults with kidney disease and one vaccine (Pfizer) is licensed for young people aged 16 and over. They are suitable whether you have a transplant, are on dialysis or have other kidney conditions. There is no evidence that one is better or safer than another - they just work in different ways. The Covid-19 vaccine will not dialyse out and there is no evidence that it would lead to rejection of a kidney transplant or cause any harm to your kidneys.

The vaccines do not contain any animal products.

How do I get the vaccine?

The Covid-19 vaccine will be provided free of charge by the NHS. It is given as an injection into your upper arm in two doses. You will have the second dose between 3-12 weeks after receiving the first. To help protect those who need it the most, the vaccine is being offered to groups at highest risk first - often referred to as clinically extremely vulnerable. **People aged 16 and above with kidney transplants, those on the transplant waiting list, those on dialysis or with CKD stage five have been identified as a key priority and the government committed to offering the first dose of the vaccine to all those in the highest risk groups by the middle of February 2021. People aged 16 and above with chronic kidney disease (stages three-four), including those with nephrotic syndrome, will be offered the vaccine after mid-February.**

You may receive your vaccination at your GP surgery, a local hospital, your dialysis or transplant unit or a dedicated mass vaccination centre. You will be contacted by phone or post and invited to an appointment.

Are there any side effects?

You may have mild side effects after receiving the Covid-19 vaccine, similar to those after a flu jab. These could include:

- Having a sore arm where the injection was (most people will have this)
- Feeling tired
- A headache

Side effects are likely to be mild and only last for a few days. Tell your healthcare team before you are vaccinated if you are concerned about the side effects or if you have ever had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a vaccine or other medication.

The risks of getting seriously ill with Covid-19 if you do not have the vaccine are far greater than the mild side effects that you may experience from it.

Does age or ethnicity affect how well the vaccines work?

No. Your age or ethnicity does not affect how well the vaccine works as it is equally effective for everyone. As older people are more likely to get seriously ill with Covid-19, it is important that they are vaccinated first.

Should I have the vaccine if I am pregnant, trying to get pregnant or breastfeeding?

At the moment, pregnant women in the general population, with no underlying health conditions, are not being offered the vaccine. Although, there is no evidence that the vaccine will put mother or baby at risk, this has not yet been specifically tested. The government therefore advise that, until more information is available, pregnant women should not routinely have the vaccine.

However, vaccination is recommended if you are pregnant and have severe kidney disease (stage five), are on dialysis, have a transplant or as advised by your doctor as you are taking a certain level of immunosuppressants. This is because you are at higher risk of catching Covid-19 or of developing serious complications after infection. Please talk to your healthcare team about this as they can advise about your specific situation.

There is no evidence that any of the UK vaccines can affect fertility. It is safe to have the vaccine if you are trying to get pregnant or are breastfeeding.

Can I catch Covid-19 from the vaccine?

No.

None of the three vaccines that are currently used in the UK are 'live'. This means that they don't contain active or 'live' virus so you can't catch Covid-19 from the vaccination. They work by teaching your immune system to recognise the virus so it can fight it if it comes into contact with it again later.

I've already had Covid-19. Should I still get the vaccine?

Yes. The government recommend that everyone in the priority groups – which includes kidney patients - receive the vaccine, even if you have already had Covid-19. The vaccine will give you additional protection and help to protect the wider population.

Will the vaccine stop me from getting Covid-19?

The vaccine is designed to stop people from becoming seriously ill with Covid-19 and needing hospital treatment. The first dose of the vaccine will give you good protection but the second is needed to provide long term protection. There is a small chance that you could still catch the virus even if you have had the vaccine but it will be in a much milder form, although you may still be able to pass it onto someone else.

Do I still need to shield if I have the vaccine?

If you have been advised to shield then you should continue to do so after you have the vaccine. The government will lift the shielding advice when vaccination and other measures have had a significant

impact on the spread of the virus throughout the population. The vaccine is a vital step but it is not an immediate way out of the restrictions.

It is therefore very important to continue to follow government advice and maintain the golden rules:

HANDS FACE SPACE

- Wash your hands frequently
- Wear a face covering when inside any public area or shop
- Stay at least two metres apart from people you don't live with or who aren't in your 'bubble'

Remember!

- **The Covid-19 vaccine is safe and effective. Your kidney care team strongly advise you to have the vaccine when it is offered to you.**
- **Talk to your kidney care team if you have any concerns or questions.**
- **Continue to follow all government advice, especially HANDS, FACE, SPACE**

Where can I find more information?

- Kidney Care UK: Coronavirus (Covid-19) guidance for patients with kidney disease - www.kidneycareuk.org/coronavirus
- Videos from the BAME community clinical, faith and patient leaders explaining the vaccine process https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI_VUbDywl6ceV5p-uoOFO2m5Q8DinFWL
- Gov.uk: Coronavirus - www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- Renal Association and British Renal Society: Covid-19 vaccinations for adult patients with kidney disease - <https://renal.org/health-professionals/Covid-19/ra-resources/Covid-19-vaccination-adult-patients-kidney-disease>

This information was produced in February 2021 on behalf of the kidney community, using the latest government and NHS guidance and that of the Renal Association and its partners. Please base your vaccine decision on accurate and factual information.