I have questions about COVID-19 vaccination

Evidence-based answers to frequently asked questions about COVID-19 vaccination for adults.

SKAI Sharing Knowledge About Immunisation
Adult

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Are COVID-19 vaccines safe even though they were made quickly?

Yes, COVID-19 vaccines are safe. We know they are safe because the clinical trials testing the vaccines were very large, involving tens of thousands of people, and because there have now been over 11 billion doses delivered worldwide.

Health authorities around the world have been observing COVID-19 vaccines very closely to ensure their ongoing safety. As with any vaccine, there are mild common side effects. There have also been some rare serious adverse events reported with some COVID-19 vaccines.

Scientists were able to make COVID-19 vaccines quickly because of:

- **Cooperation and combined efforts**. Many scientists from around the world worked together on the development of vaccines for COVID-19. By cooperating with each other, scientists were able to make these new vaccines faster.

- **Funding**. COVID-19 vaccines were made quickly in part because there was a lot of money available to fund research, as well as to develop and make the vaccines. This funding allowed researchers and manufacturers to run clinical trials, scale up production, and get the vaccines approved and distributed quickly.

- **Many safety tests (clinical trials) happening at the same time**. When developing vaccines, scientists run tests called 'clinical trials' to confirm the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines. While developing COVID-19 vaccines, scientists were able to run many clinical trials at the same time.

- **COVID-19 in the community.** Scientists can complete clinical trials for vaccines more quickly when lots of people in the community have the disease the vaccines are trying to prevent. If lots of people have the disease, it means researchers can detect differences between vaccinated and unvaccinated people a lot sooner. This was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **New science and technology.** In the past, it could take a long time to make virus parts for vaccines. New and improved science now allows us to use the 'building blocks', or genetic codes, of a virus. This new science leads to faster vaccine production.

Do I need another dose of the COVID-19 vaccine if I've already caught the COVID-19 virus?

Yes. You should get vaccinated against COVID-19, including all recommended additional doses, even if you have already had the COVID-19 virus. However, it is recommended that you wait six months after having the COVID-19 virus before receiving another dose of the vaccine. This is because being sick with COVID-19 may protect you for several months against getting very unwell from a future infection.

The protection you get from having the COVID-19 virus does fade away. Getting vaccinated six months or more after you had COVID-19 can renew your protection against getting very sick, going to the hospital, or even dying from the virus.

Do I need another dose of the COVID-19 vaccine if I've already had two vaccines?

The protection you got from your first two COVID-19 vaccines will decrease over time. This means you may get sick from COVID-19 again.

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According to the latest advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), **it is recommended that you get another dose of the COVID-19 vaccine if:**

- **you're an adult aged 75 years or more and 6 months have passed since your last dose**

The latest advice also recommends that you consider another dose of the COVID-19 vaccine if:

- you're an adult aged 65-74 years
- you're an adult aged 18-64 years and are severely immunocompromised.

Within the above groups, an additional COVID-19 dose is likely to be of most benefit to those who:

- have no known history of SARS-CoV-2 infection (and are unlikely to have hybrid immunity)
- have medical comorbidities that increase you're risk of severe COVID-19, or disability with significant or complex health needs, or
- reside in a residential aged care facility.

Getting an additional COVID-19 dose means your body will be able to fight the virus much faster when you come into contact with it. An additional dose also helps protect you from serious COVID-19 related health problems, and even death. It can protect you against new variants of the COVID-19 virus as they emerge over time.

In one US study, scientists compared how COVID-19 vaccination protected different people. This study compared people with no COVID-19 vaccines (unvaccinated); people with one or two COVID-19 vaccines; and people with an additional dose. Out of all the groups, people with the additional dose were less likely to stay in hospital because of COVID-19.

Do current COVID-19 vaccines protect against new variants of the virus?

Yes, the current vaccines protect against all known variants of the COVID-19 virus. COVID-19 vaccination also helps keep your body strong to fight against any new variants of the COVID-19 virus that emerge in the future.

It is normal for viruses to change over a short period of time. This is why there are so many new variants of the COVID-19 virus. These new variants of the COVID-19 virus are very easy to spread. In some countries, this fast spread of the virus caused many people to become ill with COVID-19.

To date, there have been several different variants of the COVID-19 virus.

Scientists made the first COVID-19 vaccines before these new virus variants even existed. Research now shows that the first COVID-19 vaccines still help your body fight against newer virus variants.

For example, one study compared two groups of people: people who had not been vaccinated for COVID-19; and people who had been vaccinated with two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech, the COVID-19 vaccine made by Pfizer.

This study showed that people who had been vaccinated continued to have protection against the COVID-19 virus, but the level of protection changed, or varied, with each new variant. Even though this protection varied, the vaccines still protected people from serious impacts including getting very sick, going to the hospital, and/or death.

Scientists continue to work together to make vaccines better against these new variants of COVID-19. To do this, many new vaccines combine new and old variants of COVID-19 viruses. Having both the new and old COVID-19 virus variants in vaccines will help protect you against severe illness.

Do COVID-19 vaccines protect me against long COVID?

COVID-19 vaccines may decrease your chances of getting long COVID. Long COVID is a set of

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symptoms that can develop and persist at least three months after catching the COVID-19 virus. Signs of long COVID can include:

- tiredness
- difficulty breathing
- chest pain
- difficulty thinking or 'brain fog'
- and other health problems.

A recent study found that at least 10% of people will experience long COVID after catching COVID-19 virus.

Overall, getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is a way to keep yourself healthy, prevent serious illness, and may lower your risk of having long COVID.

Where can I go to get vaccinated?

Your GP, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS), pharmacists or other immunisation provider will be able to give you a COVID-19 vaccination.

You can find COVID-19 vaccination services near you using the HealthDirect Service Finder. If you need help making a COVID-19 vaccine booking, the Australian Government's Easy Vaccine Access service can help by putting you in touch with a trained operator from the National Coronavirus Helpline.

For information about COVID-19 symptoms, COVID-19 vaccines, and vaccine clinic locations and contact information, phone the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080. ■

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Why are COVID-19 vaccines being developed so quickly?
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How have COVID-19 vaccines been tested?
https://ncirs.org.au/covid-19/covid-19-vaccines-frequently-asked-questions

How Can Covid-19 Vaccine Development Be Done Quickly And Safely?
https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/vaccines/timeline

Do I still need a COVID-19 vaccine (including a booster dose) even if I've already caught the COVID-19 virus?

Do I need a COVID-19 vaccine, including a booster dose, if I have already had COVID-19 in the past?
https://ncirs.org.au/covid-19/covid-19-vaccines-frequently-asked-questions

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https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/fact-sheets/item/post-covid-19-condition