



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA  
**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**



# **COVID-19 VACCINE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION - JUNE 2021**





# What You Need to Know

## INTRODUCTION

This document contains the frequently asked questions and answers to provide you with more information about the COVID19 vaccines and why it is important for you to get vaccinated, or encourage those around you to get vaccinated as long as they are eligible.

**#COVIDVaccinationUG**

# GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 AND COVID-19 VACCINE

## 1. What is novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and how does it spread?

COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. The World Health Organisation (WHO) first learned of this new virus from cases in Wuhan city in China on 31st December 2019. The virus can spread from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles (droplets) when they cough, sneeze, talk, sing or breathe heavily. The main way the virus spreads is when people are in direct or close contact (less than 1 meter) with an infected person.

Recently, new COVID-19 variants have been detected in Uganda. These seem to be more deadly than the original virus in causing severe disease and death to those infected. The circulating variants are from: India, South Africa, Nigeria and UK.

## 2. What are the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 infection?

- The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough, and fatigue.
- Other symptoms that are less common include loss of taste or smell, nasal congestion, conjunctivitis (red eyes), sore throat, headache, muscle or joint pain, skin rash, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, chills or dizziness. These symptoms are usually mild.
- Some people may get infected but only have very mild symptoms or none at all. Those with no symptoms at all are referred to as "asymptomatic".

- Some people may get infected and progress to severe disease. Symptoms of severe COVID-19 disease include shortness of breath, loss of appetite, confusion, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, and high temperature (above 38°C).
- People of all ages who experience fever and/or cough associated with difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, loss of speech or movement should seek medical attention immediately.

### **3. Who is most at risk of severe illness from COVID-19?**

People aged 50 years and above and those with underlying medical problems like diabetes, hypertension, heart, kidney or liver disease are at higher risk of developing serious illness. However, anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die irrespective of their age.

### **4. How can I protect myself from COVID-19?**

**To minimise the risk of getting COVID-19, follow these basic precautions:**

- Maintain a physical distancing of at least 2 metres from others
- Wear a mask properly, covering your mouth and nose when in public;
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and clean water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser (at least 60% alcohol content)
- Avoid touching surfaces and clean surfaces regularly with standard disinfectants
- Keep rooms well ventilated with open windows
- Avoid crowds
- Avoid hand shaking and hugs
- Cover your mouth while coughing and sneezing with a bent elbow or tissue. Dispose off the tissue in a dust bin.

## 5. Is there a vaccine for COVID-19 disease?

Yes, there are a number of vaccines that have been developed and are being used in different countries. Others are still under development.

## 6. How are COVID-19 vaccines developed?

Several different types of vaccines for COVID-19 have been developed and are in different stages of human use. The different types of COVID-19 vaccines include:

- Inactivated or weakened virus vaccines – use a form of the virus that has been inactivated or weakened so it doesn't cause disease, but still generates an immune response.
- Protein-based vaccines – use harmless fragments of proteins or protein shells that mimic the COVID-19 virus to safely generate an immune response.
- Viral vector vaccines – use a virus that has been genetically engineered so that it can't cause disease but produces coronavirus proteins to safely generate an immune response.
- RNA and DNA vaccines – use genetically engineered RNA or DNA to generate a protein that safely prompts an immune response.

## 7. What are the different COVID-19 vaccines available?

There are many candidate vaccines that have undergone clinical trials to determine their effectiveness and safety for human use. The following vaccines have demonstrated efficacy levels as high as 95% in preventing symptomatic COVID-19 infections. The

vaccines that have so far been listed by WHO for emergency use are:

- AstraZeneca/Serum Institute of India
- AstraZeneca/South Korea Bio
- Astra Zeneca EU
- The Pfizer – BioNTech Vaccine
- Moderna Vaccine
- Sinopharm Vaccine
- Johnson and Johnson Vaccine
- Janssen Vaccine
- Sinovac-coronaVac

## **8. Is Uganda going to conduct COVID-19 vaccination?**

Yes, the Government of Uganda started free COVID-19 vaccination for the population aged 18 years and above. Phase 1 of the vaccination exercise commenced on 10th March 2021.

## **9. Which COVID-19 vaccines are being used in Uganda?**

Uganda is using vaccines whose development technology is known to us and is used for traditional vaccines similar to the AstraZeneca vaccine. This vaccine has been approved by the World Health Organization and the National Drug Authority for use in Uganda. As more vaccines become available on the global market, our scientists will evaluate and advise accordingly.

## **10. Why is Uganda currently using the Oxford-AstraZeneca Vaccine?**

Although there are many vaccines currently undergoing research, Uganda opted for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from Serum Institute of India. This is because the vaccine technology has been tested for over a century and the vaccine fridges in our health facilities meet the storage temperature requirements of

+2– °C to +8 °C. This is contrary to newer technologies (mRNA vaccines) which require ultra-cold chain (-80°C) that is difficult to meet in our country context.

## 11. Does the AstraZeneca vaccine work on new variants?

Viruses change as they circulate, and these changes may alter the virus characteristics. It's key to stop the spread of the virus at its source by maintaining good hand hygiene, physical distancing, masking and all other measures to reduce transmission. The more people get vaccinated, the more virus circulation will be reduced and lower the chance for new mutations and variants.

More studies are needed to assess the effectiveness of the current COVID vaccines against the variants, however current preliminary data suggest that the vaccines stimulate enough immunity to retain substantial efficacy against most variants especially for severe disease, hospitalization, or death.

WHO therefore recommends the continued use of the AstraZeneca vaccine even if new variants are present.

## VACCINE ELIGIBILITY AND PRIORITY GROUPS

## 12. Which groups of people are prioritized to get the vaccine first and why?

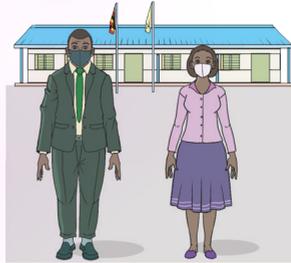
The following priority groups that are most at risk of getting COVID-19 due to their occupational risk of infection, risk of developing severe disease and death from COVID-19, the following have been prioritized for the first phase of the vaccine rollout

- Health workers working in public and private health facilities.
- Teachers
- Security personnel
- Persons aged 50 years and above
- Persons aged 18 to 50 years with underlying illnesses such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, heart, kidney and liver diseases
- Other identified priority groups

Due to a global shortage, the COVID-19 vaccines are currently limited in supply. The Government of Uganda is committed to providing FREE COVID-19 vaccination to all persons aged 18 years and above starting with the prioritized groups.



Health workers



Teachers



Security Personnel



Persons aged 50 years and above



Persons aged 18 to 50 years with underlying illnesses

### **13. Why are the above age groups a priority group for COVID-19 vaccination?**

- Data from the Ministry of Health shows that the above people are not only at high risk of getting COVID-19 infection or get admitted in ICU but are more likely to die from the disease.
- Health workers, security personnel and teachers are by the nature of their work exposed to COVID-19 infection.
- People above 50 years and those aged 18 to 50 years with underlying conditions such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, heart/kidney/liver disease have weaker immune systems which put them at a higher risk of dying from COVID-19 infection.

### **14. Where is COVID-19 vaccination taking place?**

- COVID-19 vaccination is taking place in public health facilities including National and Regional Referral Hospitals, General Hospitals, Health Center IVs and Health Center IIIs. All eligible persons are advised to access their vaccines from these facilities on the designated days.
- All eligible persons must carry their National IDs with them when they go for vaccination while those without National IDs will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

### **15. If you had COVID-19 and recovered, would you still need to get vaccinated?**

Yes. Even if you recover from COVID-19, you still need to get vaccinated to prevent severe disease.



Once was Sick  
of covid-19



Now he has taken  
the Vaccine



Recovered

## 16. Is there anyone who should not get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. Currently, all individuals below 18 years will not be vaccinated until there is clear evidence provided by the World Health Organisation on the suitability of vaccination of this age group.

## 17. Why are persons below 18 years of age not being vaccinated?

COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials have not yet been conducted on persons below 18 years of age. However, the good news is that clinical studies have started on children aged 6 to 17 years of age by Oxford University

## VACCINE AVAILABILITY AND ADMINISTRATION

### 18. Is it safe to receive the COVID-19 vaccine with other vaccines (e.g., flu shot)?

Currently It is recommended to wait for 14 days before another vaccine is administered

### 19. Where will the vaccine be administered?

The vaccines will be administered intramuscularly via an injection into the upper left arm.



### 20. How many doses of the vaccine will each person receive and at what interval?

The AstraZeneca vaccine we currently have in the country requires each individual to receive two doses given 8 weeks apart but not beyond 12 weeks. Every individual must take two doses in order to complete the vaccination schedule and get maximum protection against severe COVID-19.

## VACCINE SAFETY AND EFFICACY

### 21. How do we know if COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

- There are many strict measures in place to ensure that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe. COVID-19 vaccines go through a rigorous, multi-stage testing process, including large trials that involve tens of thousands of people. These trials, which include people at high risk for COVID-19, are designed to identify common side effects or other safety concerns.
- If a clinical trial shows that a COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective, a series of independent reviews of the efficacy and safety evidence is required, including regulatory review and approval in the country where the vaccine is manufactured, before WHO considers a vaccine product for prequalification. Part of this process also involves a review of all the safety evidence by the Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety.
- An external panel of experts convened by WHO analyzes the results from clinical trials and along with evidence on the disease, age groups affected, risk factors for disease, and other information, and recommends whether the vaccines should be used or not. Regulatory Authorities in individual countries decide whether to approve the vaccines for national use and develop policies on how to use the vaccines in their country based on WHO recommendations.
- After a COVID-19 vaccine is introduced, WHO supports work with vaccine manufacturers, the Ministry of Health, and other partners to monitor any safety concerns/adverse effects on an ongoing basis.
- In Uganda, the National Drug Authority also reviews and approves vaccines to ensure safety of Ugandans.

## **22. How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine and how long will protection last after vaccination?**

It is important to note that the COVID-19 vaccine is effective in preventing severe disease and death. However, it is too early to know if COVID-19 vaccines will provide long-term protection. Research is still ongoing.

## **23. What are the benefits of getting the COVID-19 vaccine?**

The benefits of getting the COVID-19 vaccine include the following:

- Protection from severe disease and death.
- Reduction in the rapid spread of infection.
- Reduction in hospitalization due to COVID-19 patients.

Please note that even after vaccination you need to continue to follow all the SOPs like physical distancing, wearing a mask, hand and respiratory hygiene and avoiding crowds.

## **24. How will the Ministry of Health know that the vaccines are safe?**

The National Drug Authority which is the body responsible for safety and quality has approved the vaccine for use after a rigorous process of evaluation, and approval by the World Health Organization.

## **25. How is it possible to develop a safe vaccine so quickly?**

While COVID-19 vaccines have been developed faster than any other vaccine in history, safety and quality were just as much a focus as in any other vaccine development. Scientists and funders prioritized COVID-19 vaccine development because of the global emergency. The vaccines that are now being reviewed

and approved by regulatory bodies have been through the same amount of testing and safety processes as other vaccines. The speed in the development of COVID-19 vaccine has also been made possible because of the availability of new tools and technologies used in vaccine development.

## COMMON SIDE EFFECTS AFTER VACCINATION

### **26. What are some of the common likely side effects one may get after getting the AstraZeneca vaccine?**

It is normal to experience side effects from COVID-19 vaccines such as the AstraZeneca vaccine, and some people might experience side effects after getting a vaccine. Side effects are usually very minor and of short duration and usually improve within hours or up to 2 days after vaccination. Such mild side effects include:

- Pain at injection site
- Sore arm
- Mild fever
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Chills
- Joint pain

It is important to note that if the side effects persist for longer than 6 hours, use paracetamol tablets as prescribed by the health worker, and if they persist for more than two (2) days, visit the nearest health facility. However, these likely side effects should not stop one from getting vaccinated. Remember, vaccines are very safe and effective. The advantages of using vaccines far outweigh the likely side effects.

## **27. Is there a particular age group that is more likely to be affected by side effects?**

No. Side effects can occur in any age group.

## **28. What are some of the allergic reactions that can occur after getting the COVID-19 vaccine?**

It is possible for some people to develop an allergic reaction after getting the vaccine. Allergic reactions can happen within the first 4 hours of getting vaccinated with symptoms such as hives, swelling, and wheezing. However, immediately after vaccination, stay at the vaccination center for 30 minutes to enable the medical team to monitor you for any reaction that may occur.

## **29. How can a person know if she/he is experiencing side effects or possible COVID-19 infection?**

The side effects of the vaccine start within 12 to 24 hours of vaccination, but it may be difficult to tell the two apart if you become infected between vaccine doses. If you experience any side effects, you should visit the nearest health facility with immediate effect for further clinical evaluation and management.

## **30. What adverse events have been reported in relation to the AstraZeneca vaccine?**

After widespread vaccination with the AstraZeneca vaccine worldwide, there have been reports of few vaccine recipients in Europe getting unusual blood clots also termed as Vaccine-Induced Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia. Any association of AstraZeneca vaccine with these events is still being investigated, and the public will be notified of any development. However,

the benefits of getting vaccinated still outweigh the risks and the Ministry of Health encourages all eligible persons to receive their vaccine doses.

### **31. What are some of the common signs and symptoms of blood clots?**

Below are the common signs and symptoms which manifest in people with blood clotting disease:

- Persistent and severe headache
- Having a blurred or double vision
- Episodes of seizures
- Shortness of breath
- Abdominal or chest pain
- Swelling and redness in a limb
- Paleness and coldness in a limb

If anyone has any of the above symptoms after COVID-19 vaccination, s/he should seek medical care immediately from the hospital.

### **32. Are there any other medical or individual related practices that have led to some forms of blood clotting among humans?**

As indicated earlier, blood clotting can happen to any person whether vaccinated or not. The use of AstraZeneca vaccine only poses a rare risk of 4 cases in one million persons, which is 0.0004%. This percentage is very low, and the public should not worry about it. It is important to note that even when the rare likely event occurs, the medical teams can ably manage the patient.

It is important to note that being infected with COVID-19 without vaccination can lead to 165,000 cases among one million positive individuals, which gives a 16.5% risk percentage. Therefore, being vaccinated is much safer than not being vaccinated.

### 33. Where can one report adverse events following immunization?

In case of any suspected side effects, visit the nearest health facility immediately or call the Ministry of Health Toll free lines on 0800 100 066 & 0800 200 600 or reach the National Drug Authority by calling 0800 101 999, SMS \*284\*99# or WhatsApp 0791415555 and mobile app MedSafety.

## VACCINE RELATED MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

### 34. Is it true that when you receive the COVID-19 Vaccination then you must stay away from alcohol for 40 days?

The World Health Organization (WHO) advises that excessive consumption of alcohol compromises the immunity of an individual. However, there is no scientific evidence to show that when you are vaccinated against COVID-19, you should stay away from alcohol for 40 days. **Remember**, excessive consumption of alcohol is harmful to your health.

### 35. Should pregnant women be vaccinated?

Pregnant women may receive the vaccine if the benefit of vaccination outweighs the potential vaccine risks. For this reason, pregnant women at high risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (e.g. health workers and teachers) or who have underlying illnesses which add to their risk of severe disease, may be vaccinated.

### 36. Is it safe for breast feeding mothers to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine?

Yes. Breastfeeding mothers should get vaccinated when their turn comes. The current COVID-19 vaccines have no harm to the mother and the breastfeeding mother.

### 37. Is it true that many people are dying of COVID -19 after getting vaccinated against COVID-19?

The explanation for those few who develop severe disease after receiving the two recommended doses and at recommended interval and unfortunately pass on show that they may have got the disease when the body had not developed the required protection against COVID-19. There is no vaccine that is 100% effective. That is the reason why even after vaccination you need to continue protecting yourself by wearing a mask, hand washing, avoiding crowds and physical distancing. We can only say that we are safe when over 90% of the population around you have been vaccinated to offer 'herd immunity'.

Remember, the current vaccine prevents severe disease and death but will not prevent you from getting infected from the virus.

### 38. Do I need to first test before I get vaccinated?

No, it is not recommended to get a COVID -19 test before getting vaccinated. However, if you have any symptoms before vaccination, you are highly advised to seek medical care so that proper treatment is provided and once you are well then you can proceed to receive your jab.

## ACCESSING HELP

For more details about the COVID-19 vaccination exercise, visit the Ministry of Health

**website: [www.health.go.ug](http://www.health.go.ug) or call the Ministry of Health**

**Toll free line on 0800 10006 & 0800 200 600 or visit the**

**WHO website [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)**

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## KEY MESSAGES

- **Protect yourself from COVID-19.** Get your **FREE** COVID-19 vaccination today.
- **COVID-19 is more dangerous for the elderly** & people with underlying conditions. Protect these people in your family, get your **FREE** COVID-19 vaccination today.
- **As a concerned citizen, you are a role model in your society.** Get vaccinated today and encourage others to get vaccinated.
- **FACT:** The COVID-19 vaccine has been through extensive, rigorous testing and safety processes like other vaccines. The COVID-19 vaccine is **SAFE** and **EFFECTIVE** and has been approved by the WHO and National Drug Authority.
- **Uganda is currently using the AstraZeneca vaccine** because it is **SAFE** and **EFFECTIVE** and easy to store. It can be stored at a temperature of +2C to +8C.
- **The COVID-19 AstraZeneca Vaccine has a two-dose regimen** and will be administered 8 to 12 weeks apart by injection intramuscularly in the upper left arm. To get maximum protection against COVID-19, each individual must take two doses of the vaccine to be taken 8 to 12 weeks apart in order to complete the vaccination schedule.
- **As with all other vaccines, minor side effects such as pain at the injection site,** a sore arm, a mild fever can occur after getting the vaccine. These side effects usually improve within hours and up to 2 days after vaccination. Seek medical attention if side effects persist for longer than 2 days.
- The COVID-19 vaccine helps prepare your body's natural defenses to recognize and fight off the virus that causes COVID-19. For more details call the Ministry of Health toll free helpline on **0800-203-033** or **0800-303-033** or contact your District Health Office.

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**World Health  
Organization**  
Uganda

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