

HEALTH BEAT

SPECIAL EDITION: • COVID-19 Vaccination: A Doctors View • Group 3 Appointment Letter
• When Will I Be Offered a Vaccine?

COVID-19 Vaccination: A Doctors View

You need to know that it's safe, effective and available. But because of media presentation and social media hype, you want some answers.

In the first place, why get vaccinated? Well, to protect yourself and others, reduce the burden of disease on the health services and break the chain of transmission.

You may ask protection from what? COVID-19 is an unpredictably deadly disease. That is, whilst many people get a relatively mild, 'flu-like' illness, others develop organ failure, require intensive care and mechanical ventilation, and may well die; if they do survive, there are often post-infective COVID-19 syndromes with permanent damage and tiredness. In the UK now, more people are in intensive care with this than with the infection itself. The thing is, there's no way of knowing how it will affect you.

So, does the vaccine work? Increasing evidence says very much so. A recent paper in the Lancet found that 2 doses of the Cominarty (Pfizer) vaccine is 97% effective at preventing symptomatic SARS-Cov2 infection i.e COVID. It was also 98% effective at preventing hospitalisation and death.

In Israel, where over 60% of the population have been vaccinated, the figures show it is also 92% effective against asymptomatic infection. The viral load is reduced to just 25% of an unvaccinated person, and additionally there is less transmission to others. There are still cases occurring despite vaccination, but these are rare at 0.06%, and occur at least 3 months after the vaccination was given. Since there has to be re-exposure to the virus for this to happen, it's clear that the more people are vaccinated, in absolute numbers the fewer will be re-infected.

So it's worth having! What can you expect? Side effects are generally minor - a sore arm and some aches most commonly; about 1 in 4 also report fever, headache, nausea and fatigue for up to 24 hours.

For maximum effect 2 doses are given, in common with many vaccines. One dose actually provides quite good protection, and to get as many people vaccinated as possible some countries have delayed giving the second dose. However, the second dose confers that very high level (97%) of protection.

If the virus changes critically, booster doses may be required (as for the 'flu vaccine), and there is some concern overseas that not giving the second dose will result in more viral resistance. At present, most viral changes for greater infectivity alter the spike protein, where the virus attaches eg the UK variant (B1.1.7) and the South African variant (B1.351). There is real concern that the very high transmission rates currently seen in India will enable more viral adaptation. By reducing the total numbers infected, vaccination reduces the pool for viral mutation and may decrease the need for booster doses.

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine available in NZ is safe, effective and available...and yes, I've had mine.

Dr Crispin Langston, Oak House Medical Centre.



Group 3

If you are aged 65 or over, have a relevant underlying health condition, pregnant, or disabled look out for an appointment letter in your mailbox.



COVID-19 Vaccination: When will I be offered an appointment?

- Group 1 – now onwards**
Border and managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) workers
- Group 2 – now onwards**
High-risk frontline workers and people living in high-risk places
- Group 3 – now onwards**
People who are at risk of getting very sick from COVID-19
- Group 4 – July-December**
Everyone



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