



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



COVID-19 VACCINE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What Health Workers need to know

Introduction

This document contains a compilation of frequently asked questions with answers to enable you as a health worker to respond accurately to community concerns on COVID-19 vaccination.

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 Organization (WHO) first learned of this new virus from cases in Wuhan, People's Republic of China on 31 December 2019. The virus can spread from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles (droplets) when they cough, sneeze, speak, 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.

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, different types of skin rash, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, chills or dizziness.

- Symptoms are usually mild. Some people become infected but only have very mild symptoms or none at all. Those with no symptoms at all are referred to as “asymptomatic”.
- 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).
- Other less common symptoms are irritability, confusion, reduced consciousness (sometimes associated with seizures), anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and more severe and rare neurological complications such as strokes, brain inflammation, delirium, and nerve damage.
- People of all ages who experience fever and/or cough associated with difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, or loss of speech or movement; should immediately seek medical attention.

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

People aged 50 and over and those with underlying medical problems like diabetes, hypertension, heart/kidney/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 the age.

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

To limit the risks of getting COVID-19, follow these basic precautions:

- Practice physical distancing of at least 2 metres away from others
- Wear a mask properly covering your mouth and nose when working on patients/ clients and when in public;
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and clean water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (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 coughs and sneezes with a bent elbow or tissue
- Practice all the other infection control procedures when in a clinic setting

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

Yes, there are some vaccines that have been developed and approved for use by different countries.

6. How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

The vaccines for COVID-19 are all designed to teach the body's immune system to safely recognize and block the virus that causes COVID-19.

Several different types of vaccines for COVID-19 have been developed and are being developed, including:

- Inactivated or weakened virus vaccines: They use a weakened form of the virus that does not cause disease, but still generates an immune response.
- Protein-based vaccines: They are composed of harmless fragments of proteins or protein shells that mimic the COVID-19 virus to safely generate an immune response.
- Viral vector vaccines: These use a virus that has been genetically engineered so that it can't cause disease but produces coronavirus proteins to safely prompt an immune response.
- RNA and DNA vaccines – It is a new approach that uses genetically engineered RNA or DNA to generate a protein that safely prompts an immune response.

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

As of 8th April, 2020, 115 vaccine candidates are undergoing clinical research to determine their safety and effectiveness for human use. Of these, 78 are confirmed as active and 37 are unconfirmed. Of the 78 confirmed active projects, 73 are currently at exploratory or pre-clinical stages.

The following vaccines have passed Phase III trials with a demonstrated efficacy as high as 95% in preventing symptomatic COVID-19 infections. Some of the vaccines authorized by at least one country's National Regulatory Authority for public use include:

- The Pfizer – BioNtech Vaccine
- Moderna Vaccine
- BBIBP-CorV
- Covaxin
- CoronaVac
- Sputnik V
- The Oxford-AstraZeneca Vaccine
- Convidiea
- Johnson and Johnson Vaccine
- Epi VacCorona

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

Yes. The Government of Uganda is in the process of importing 18 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to conduct a COVID-19 vaccination exercise. Phase 1 of the vaccination exercise will take place in March 2021 starting with the following priority groups:

- Health workers working in both public and private facilities
- Security personnel
- Teachers
- People above 50 years
- People aged 18 to 50 years with underlying illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, heart, kidney, or liver disease

9. Which COVID-19 vaccines are going to be used in Uganda?

The Government of Uganda is working with WHO, UNICEF and other partners to import the Oxford-AstraZeneca Vaccine. Astra Zeneca has had 16 successful trials in three (3) countries. It is currently being approved for use in 43 countries. The National Drug Authority has also approved it for use in Uganda. As vaccines become available on the global scene, the Government will secure more doses for the population.

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

Although there are many vaccines currently undergoing research, after careful scientific and logistical considerations, Uganda opted for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from the 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 - +8 C. It is for this same reason that the Chinese vaccine is being considered for use in Uganda. This is contrary to newer technologies (mRNA vaccines) which require ultra-cold chain (-80 degrees C) that is difficult to meet in our country context.

Vaccine Eligibility and Priority Groups

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

Due to a global shortage, the COVID-19 vaccines are currently limited in supply. The Government of Uganda will provide **FREE** COVID-19 vaccination to all persons aged 18 years and above starting with the following priority groups of people that are most at risk of getting COVID-19:

- Health workers in public and private facilities
- Men and women in uniform (security personnel)
- Teachers
- People above 50 years
- People between 18 to 50 years with underlying conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart/kidney/liver disease
- Districts with large numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases

12. 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 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 5 conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart/kidney/liver disease have weaker immune systems which put them at a higher risk of dying from COVID-19 infection.

13. If you had the virus and recovered, will you still be able to or need to get the vaccine?

Data on whether people who previously had COVID-19 should receive COVID-19 vaccine is still being collected.

Available data suggests that most people who recover from COVID-19 develop an immune response that provides at least some protection against reinfection. Scientists are still learning how strong this protection is and how long it lasts.

14. Is there anyone who should not get the vaccine (e.g., children, pregnant/breastfeeding women, others)?

Information on people who should not receive COVID-19 vaccine is still being collected. There is currently no evidence that antibodies formed from COVID-19 vaccination cause any problem with pregnancy, including the development of the placenta. In addition, the vaccines formulations available are for people aged 18 years and above.

15. Why are persons aged 18 years and below not being vaccinated?

COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials have not yet been conducted on persons below 18 years. 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

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

Information on the safety of receiving COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as other vaccinations is still being collected.

17. Where will the vaccine be administered?

The vaccine will be administered by injection in the left upper arm, intramuscularly.

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

Each individual will receive two doses of the vaccine. These will be taken 4 to 8 weeks apart. Every individual must take two doses in order to complete the vaccination schedule and get maximum protection against COVID-19.

Vaccine Safety and Effectiveness

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

- There are many strict protections in place to help ensure that COVID-19 vaccines will be 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, will recommend whether and how the vaccines should be used. Officials in individual countries will decide whether to approve the vaccines for national use and develop policies for how to use the vaccines in their country based on the WHO recommendations.
- After a COVID-19 vaccine is introduced, WHO will support work with vaccine manufacturers, the Ministry of Health, and other partners to monitor for any safety concerns/adverse effects on an ongoing basis.

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

- Information on the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines is still being collected.
- It is too early to know if COVID-19 vaccines will provide long-term protection. Additional research is to be undertaken.
- However, it is encouraging that available data suggests that most people who recover from COVID-19 develop an immune response that provides at least some protection against reinfection. However, we are still learning how strong this protection is and how long it lasts.

21. How many doses of COVID-19 vaccine will be needed?

During the first phase of COVID-19 vaccination, Uganda will be using the Oxford-AstraZeneca Vaccine which has a two-dose regimen.

22. What are the benefits of getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

While wearing masks, handwashing with soap and maintaining physical distancing help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others, vaccines are preparing your body's natural defenses to recognise and fight off the virus that causes COVID-19. Both series of measures are complementary.

23. How will the Ministry of Health know that the vaccines are safe?

The most commonly used vaccines we have today have been in use for decades, with millions of people receiving them safely every year. In addition, there are several new vaccines under development to prevent more life-threatening diseases – such as COVID-19, Zika or Nipah viruses. As with all medicines, every vaccine needs to go through extensive and rigorous testing before it can be used in humans and at large scale. Once they are in use, they must be continuously monitored to make sure they are safe for the people who receive them.

24. 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 was just as much a focus as in any other vaccine development. Scientists 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 and Risk for Serious Reactions

25. What are the most common side effects of COVID-19 vaccination and how should I deal with them?

In general, vaccines are very safe. As with all medicines, side effects can occur after getting a vaccine.

- However, these are usually very minor and of short duration, such as pain at injection site, a sore arm, a mild fever and others. Use a warm compress to soothe redness and soreness at the injection site and take paracetamol for body aches or mild fever. Side effects usually improve within hours and up to 2 days after vaccination. Please contact your nearest health facility if side effects persist for longer than 2 days.
- More serious side effects are possible, but extremely rare. A person is far more likely to be seriously harmed by a disease than by a vaccine. Vaccine-preventable diseases like Measles, Meningitis or Polio can be deadly or cause severe illness and disability.

26. Can the vaccine infect me with COVID-19?

Information on the risk of acquiring COVID-19 disease from the vaccine is still being collected. However, some vaccines are developed by using dead or weakened viruses which cannot cause COVID-19.

27. Where will COVID-19 vaccination take place?

There will be different COVID-19 Vaccination points for the different categories of people as follows:

- Health workers (both public and private) will be vaccinated at Health Centre IVs, General Hospital and Regional Referral Hospitals.
- Persons aged 50 years and above will be vaccinated at Health Centre IIIs. They 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.
- Persons aged 18 to 50 years with underlying conditions (diabetes, hypertension, heart/kidney/liver disease) will be vaccinated at Health Centre IIIs. They 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.

Additional Information

28. Is there a toll-free number, website or social media group for community members and healthcare providers to get correct information about the COVID-19 vaccine?

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

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KEY MESSAGES

- **Get your vaccination**, you are under the biggest risk. Protect yourselves to save others.
- **Take care of yourself and your loved ones** by getting vaccination. COVID-19 is especially dangerous for the elderly and people with underlying conditions in your family, which can be life-threatening for them.
- **Get vaccinated to protect your patients**, get your vaccination to save yourself.
- **As a health worker, you are an example** and the most trusted source of information for your patients. Get vaccinated and strongly recommend to your patients to get vaccinated.
- **As a health worker it is your responsibility to be protected** and protect others, get vaccinated.

#COVIDVaccinationUG



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