THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

COVID-19 VACCINE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What You Need to Know

#COVIDVaccinationUG

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Introduction

This document contains the frequently asked questions and answers to provide you with informationon the COVID-19 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.

General information about COVID-19 and COVID-19 Vaccine

1. What is the Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (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.

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. Symptoms are usually mild.
- 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 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, liver disease are at higher risk of developing severe 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 limit the risks of getting COVID-19, follow these basic precautions:

- Practice physical distancing of at least 2 meters away from others
- Wear a mask properly, covering your mouth and nose when in public, and while at home when you are caring for an infected person who is under home based care/isolation.
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and clean water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser (at least 60% alcohol content)
- Avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth
- 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 WHO and 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 recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. Some vaccines are still under development.

7. How are the vaccines developed?

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

- 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 cannot 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.

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

There are many candidate vaccines undergoing clinical research to determine their safety, and effectiveness for human use. 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 that have been authorized include:

- The Oxford-AstraZeneca Vaccine
- The Pfizer – BioNtech Vaccine
- Moderna Vaccine
- BBIBP-CorV

- Covaxin
- CoronaVac
- Sputnik V
- Convidiea
- Johnson and Johnson Vaccine
- Epi VacCorona

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

Yes, the Government of Uganda has launched COVID-19 vaccination exercise. Phase I of the vaccination exercise commenced on 10th March 2021.

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

Uganda will use 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.

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

Although there are many vaccines currently undergoing research, 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 to +8°C. This is contrary to newer technologies (mRNA vaccines such as the Pfizer vaccine) which require ultra-cold chain of -80°C that is difficult to meet in our country context.

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, death from COVID-19, population characteristics (age, gender, geographical location) have been prioritized for the first phase of the vaccine roll out:

- 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 diabetes, hypertension, heart, kidney and liver diseases
- Other priority groups will be identified and targeted as more vaccines become available.

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.

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 but are more likely to develop severe illness and 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 diabetes, hypertension, heart/kidney/liver disease are at a higher risk of dying from COVID-19 infection.

14. If you had the coronavirus and recovered, would you still need to get vaccinated?

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

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

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

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

COVID-19 vaccine research (clinical trials) has 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

17. Is it safe to receive the COVID-19 vaccine with other vaccines?

Yes. As of now, there is no information that contradicts use of COVID-19 vaccines with other vaccines. Information on the safety of receiving COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as other vaccinations is still being collected. The Ministry will update the public in case of any development.

18. Where will the vaccine be administered?

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

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

Each individual will receive two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine. These will be given 8 weeks apart. Every individual must take two doses in order to complete the vaccination schedule and get maximum protection against COVID-19. Once other vaccines with other regimens are approved for use in Uganda, the public will be informed accordingly.

Vaccine safety and Effectiveness

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

- There are many strict measures in place to ensure that 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 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 recommend whether and how the vaccines should be used. Regulatory Authorities in individual countries 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 supports work with vaccine manufacturers, the Ministry of Health, and other partners to monitor for any safety concerns/adverse effects on an ongoing basis.
- In Uganda, the National Drug Authority also reviews and approves vaccines to ensure safety for Ugandans.

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

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.

22. 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.
- Reduces the rapid spread of infection.
- An opportunity to reduce congestion in hospitals, and thus enable the health workers attend to patients with other conditions.

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 recognize and fight off the virus that causes COVID-19.

23. 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 initial approval by the World Health Organization.

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 technology that has been used in these vaccines is also tried and tested and has been under use or research for many years. 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.

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. However, as with all medicines, side effects can occur after getting a vaccine. Side effects 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 or 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.

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

No. The vaccine only works to program your body to produce antibodies to fight the corona virus disease.

27. Where will COVID-19 vaccination take place?

COVID-19 Vaccinations will take 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 should carry their passport, driver's license, work permit or refugee ID card. In case of an unregistered citizen, a guarantor's identity (preferably next of kin or LC1 or VHT) whose mobile contact is available will be required before vaccination is done.

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 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 100066** & **0800 200 600** or visit the WHO website **www.who.int**

Key Messages

- **Protect yourself from COVID-19.** Get a free COVID-19 vaccine today.
- **COVID-19 is more dangerous to the elderly** & people with underlying conditions. Protect these people in your family. Encourage them to be vaccinated.
- **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 +2 - +8°C.
- **The COVID-19 AstraZeneca Vaccine has a two-dose regimen** and will be administered 8 weeks apart by injection intramuscularly in the left upper arm. To get maximum protection against COVID-19, each individual must take two doses of the vaccine to be taken 8 weeks apart in order to complete the vaccination schedule.
- **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 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 100066** & **0800 200 600** or send a free SMS to **U-Report** on **8500** or visit the WHO **website: www.who.int**

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