Information on COVID-19 Pfizer (COMIRNATY™™) vaccine in NSW

Last updated 25 March 2021

The information provided in this information sheet relates to the COVID-19 Pfizer (COMIRNATY™) vaccine only. The vaccine course is two doses given around 21 days apart. The vaccine will be given in your upper arm.

To access this document electronically or in other languages please scan the QR code

Why is it important for me to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Catching COVID-19 can be serious and may lead to death, illness that requires hospital admission and/or long-term complications, especially in older people or those with underlying medical conditions.

You can have COVID-19 without any symptoms and pass it on to family, friends and colleagues, many of whom may be at increased risk. Being healthy does not reduce your risk of catching COVID-19 or passing it on.

Will the vaccine protect me?

The COVID-19 vaccination will substantially reduce the chance that you develop COVID-19. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective. It takes a few weeks for your body to build up protection from the vaccine. Some people may still get COVID-19 despite having been vaccinated, but they should develop a less severe illness.

Is the vaccine safe?

The COVID-19 Pfizer (COMIRNATY™) vaccine has been shown to be safe in large clinical studies of tens of thousands of people. It has also been monitored for safety issues after being given to tens of millions of people around the world. The only serious safety concern that has been identified is a risk of anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is a type of severe allergic reaction that may occur quite quickly after vaccination, but it is rare, and was reported to occur in 1 in 200,000 vaccine doses given in the USA. You will be monitored for at least 15 minutes after your vaccination for any side effects.

There have been recent reports from other countries of a unusual and specific type of clotting disorder (cerebral venous sinus thrombosis; CVST) following COVID-19 vaccination. It is not yet known whether this condition is linked to vaccination. Cases of CVST reported overseas have mostly occurred 4 to 14 days after getting the COVID-19 vaccine and have been rare (up to 8 cases per million doses of vaccine given). Further studies in these patients are being done to understand if there is a potential link with vaccination. No cases of CVST associated with vaccination have been recorded in Australia to date.

Overall, the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine are considered to outweigh this potential risk.

Will the vaccine protect the people that I am close to?

The evidence on how much COVID-19 vaccination reduces the chance of you passing on the virus is less clear. It is likely that any infection in a vaccinated person will be less severe and that vaccinated people will be less likely to pass the infection to their friends and family and to vulnerable people that they may care for. However, some vaccinated people may still get mild illness or an infection without symptoms and be able to pass the virus on.

What side effects should I expect?

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short-term, and not everyone gets them. Side effects are slightly more common after the second dose, but still usually mild. The side effects indicate that your immune system is likely to be responding.

Very common side effects in the 1-2 days following vaccination include:

- pain, tenderness or local swelling in the arm where you had your injection

- feeling tired

- headache

- general muscle or joint aches, or mild flu-like symptoms.

These symptoms normally go away in a few days. You may also develop chills or a mild fever in the 1-2 days following vaccination. You may consult a doctor if you are concerned or if the fever does not go away quickly, as this could indicate there is another cause for your fever.

You can take a normal dose of paracetamol or ibuprofen and rest to help you feel better if you develop symptoms after vaccination. You should not take these medicines before your vaccination.

As with any vaccine, if you have persistent symptoms that last more than a few days, your symptoms are getting worse, or you are concerned, please talk to your normal health care or vaccination provider.

If you do seek advice from a health care professional, make sure you tell them about your vaccination (show them your vaccination record) so that they can assess you properly.

You can also report suspected vaccine side effects through the voluntary AusVaxSafety SMS follow-up survey that you may receive, by calling the NPS MedicineWise Adverse Medicine Events line on 1300 134 237 (8am–8pm Monday–Sunday), or online through the TGA website at: https://www.tga.gov.au/form/national-adverse-events-following-immunisation-aefi-reporting-form.

Even if you have some of the common symptoms after the first dose, you still need to have the second dose. Although you should get some protection from the first dose, this may not last unless you get the second dose. The second dose is needed to give you stronger and longer-lasting protection.

Who cannot have the vaccine?

A very small number of people cannot have the COVID-19 Pfizer (COMIRNATY™) vaccine - this includes:

- People who have had anaphylaxis (a type of serious allergic reaction) following a previous dose of vaccine

- People who have had anaphylaxis to an ingredient in the vaccine (this includes to polyethylene glycol, a very rare allergy). For more information about the ingredients in the vaccine, please read the consumer product information (https://www.tga.gov.au/sites/default/files/auspar-bnt162b2-mrna-210125-pi.pdf).

- People with a medical history of a specific type of blood clots in the veins of the brain called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST), or a history of heparin induced thrombocytopenia (HIT). HIT is an immune-related complication of treatment with heparin that affects platelet function.

Can people with other allergies have the COVID-19 Pfizer (COMIRNATY™) vaccine?

If you have a history of anaphylaxis to any substance (including any vaccine, medication, food, or insect sting), you should tell your vaccination provider. You should also tell your vaccination provider before your first appointment if you have been prescribed an adrenaline autoinjector (e.g. EpiPen®) to carry for any reason. You are likely to still be able to have the vaccine if you have a history of anaphylaxis to substances that are not in the vaccine, but you may be asked to stay for observation for 30 minutes after having your vaccine.

What if I have a history of blood clots?

There is no evidence of a general increase in the risk of blood clots after COVID-19 vaccination in people with a history of clotting conditions. The COVID-19 vaccine is still recommended in people with a history of clotting conditions, except for those with the specific conditions of CVST and HIT described above. This is a precautionary measure, until we learn more from the investigations into the cases of CVST reported overseas.

People with a history of deep venous thrombosis or pulmonary embolism; people with risk factors for thrombosis (such as use of oral contraceptives or smoking); people with thrombocytopenia (low platelets that can occur with clotting conditions); people with other known clotting disorders; people on anticoagulants (e.g. warfarin) and people with a history of cardiovascular disease (such as heart attack or stroke) can all be given the vaccine.

What about people with other medical conditions?

People with certain medical conditions or circumstances listed below should discuss the best timing of the COVID-19 vaccine with their health care professional or vaccination provider. You may be able to have the vaccine now, or you may be advised or may choose to have the vaccination later. This includes if:

- you feel unwell, or have a fever before your appointment
- you are pregnant, planning pregnancy or breastfeeding
- you have a bleeding disorder or are on anticoagulants (blood thinners)
- you have a weak immune system (immunocompromise) or take medications that suppress your immune system
- you have previously been diagnosed with COVID-19.

The vaccine does not contain a virus that can multiply in the body, so it is safe for people with immune system disorders, but it may not work as well.

Please discuss your medical conditions and medications with your health care or vaccination provider before you attend, or while at, your first vaccination appointment.

What if I am pregnant, think I may be pregnant or I am breastfeeding?

You can have COVID-19 Vaccine Pfizer (COMIRNATY™) if you are breastfeeding. There are no expected safety concerns for this vaccine in breastfeeding women.

If you are pregnant, you should discuss vaccination with your health care provider or vaccination provider. Like many new medicines and vaccines, the vaccine has not yet been tested in pregnant women. The vaccine is not routinely recommended during pregnancy, but some pregnant women may choose to be vaccinated if the benefits of vaccination are likely to outweigh any potential risks.

There is no evidence that women who become pregnant after being vaccinated against COVID19 have an increased risk of developing complications that affect their pregnancy or their baby's health.

The COVID-19 vaccination decision aid for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy may help you decide if having a COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy is the right option for you.

If you find out that you are pregnant after you have had the vaccine, you do not need to do anything differently and can continue with your routine pregnancy care. The vaccine does not contain a virus that is able to multiply in your body, so it cannot cause an infection in you or your baby. Women who are breastfeeding can safely have the vaccine.

Can I go back to work after having my vaccine?

Most people should be able to go to work after being vaccinated as they will only have mild symptoms. If your arm becomes sore, you may find heavy lifting difficult. If you feel unwell or very tired you should stay home and rest until you have recovered. Most symptoms after vaccination will only last 1-2 days.

Respiratory symptoms such as sore throat, cough, a runny or blocked nose, loss of taste or smell or breathlessness are not likely to be caused by the vaccine. If you develop any of these respiratory symptoms, you should get tested for COVID-19 immediately and isolate at home until you have a negative result. You should also let your employer know.

If you develop other symptoms after the vaccine such as fatigue, headache, muscle or joint pain, chills or fever, but none of the respiratory symptoms, and the symptoms last no more than 48 hours after your vaccination, you may not need to get a COVID-19 test or to self-isolate. If the symptoms are worse than expected or last for more than 48 hours after your first or second dose, you should get tested for COVID-19 and isolate at home until you have a negative result. You should also let your employer know and follow local public health guidance in relation to the need for testing, as this guidance may change.

What if I develop any respiratory symptoms after vaccination?	What should I do?
• Cough • Sore throat • Runny nose or blocked nose • Loss of taste or smell • Breathlessness	You cannot contract COVID-19 from the vaccine. However, as these are symptoms that could be COVID-19 you should get tested and self-isolate until you receive a negative result, regardless of whether you have received the vaccine in the last two days.

What if I develop any of the other general symptoms of COVID-19 after vaccination?	What should I do?
• Pain/swelling at injection site • Redness at injection site • Tiredness • Headache • Muscle or joint pain • Chills or fever • Nausea	Stay home if you feel unwell. You do not need to get tested for COVID-19 unless: • you have any of the respiratory symptoms, such as a cough or sore throat • the general symptoms **last longer than 48 hours** after your first or second dose • your general symptoms are more severe than expected after vaccination • you are told that you have been in contact with a case of COVID-19 and are asked to be tested by public health staff.

Can I still get COVID-19 after vaccination?

No vaccine is completely effective, so even if you have had the COVID-19 vaccine there is still a chance that you may develop COVID-19. If you develop any of the general symptoms of COVID-19 other than in the 48 hours immediately after your first or second dose, get tested for COVID-19 and stay home until you have a negative result. If you develop any respiratory symptoms at any time, you should get tested and self-isolate immediately.

Can I catch COVID-19 or flu from the vaccine?

You cannot catch COVID-19 or flu from the vaccine, but you may develop mild symptoms such as tiredness, chills and muscle aches in the first few days after the vaccine. Please continue to have any regular COVID-19 screening tests that your employer arranges.

When should I not attend my COVID-19 vaccination appointment?

You should not attend your appointment for COVID-19 vaccination if you:

• are currently pregnant and have not yet discussed vaccination with a health care provider

• have been advised by the vaccination clinic or your normal medical provider not to have a COVID-19 vaccination at this time

• have had another vaccine in the 14 days before your appointment

• are feeling unwell or have a fever

• develop any symptoms that could be from COVID-19 (https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others/symptoms-and-testing), however mild

- have visited a COVID-19 exposure location (https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/latest-news-and-updates#latest-covid-19-case-locations-in-nsw) in the last 14 days, are a close contact of a COVID-19 case or are waiting for a result from a COVID-19 test.

What should I bring to my COVID-19 vaccination appointment?

- Photo ID and employee ID (if you are receiving a vaccine because of the work you do)

- Your Medicare card, if you have one (you can still receive the vaccine without one)

- Information about any medical condition that you have, particularly if you have allergies, a bleeding or clotting disorder or are taking blood thinners

- Information about any previous COVID-19 vaccine you have received (vaccine brand and date of vaccination).

What should I do after my first vaccination?

Plan to attend your second appointment, which should be around 3 weeks after your first dose. It is important to have the second dose of the vaccine around this time for the best chance of developing strong, long-lasting protection.

Make sure you keep your next appointment to get your second dose, to ensure you are well protected.

What if I'm not well on the day of my appointment?

If you are unwell or have a fever just before or on the day of your appointment, it is better to wait until you are recovered to have your vaccination. If you are unwell when your second dose is scheduled, you should reschedule this for as soon as possible. You should not attend your appointment if you are self-isolating or waiting for a COVID-19 test result.

After I've had the vaccine will I still need to follow all the COVID-19 prevention advice?

Two doses of the vaccine will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19. No vaccine is completely effective. It will take a few weeks for your body to build up protection.

You will still need to follow your workplace guidance and general public health guidance, including wearing the correct personal protective equipment and taking part in workplace screening.

To continue to protect yourself, your family, friends and colleagues you should continue taking COVID-19 preventive measures (https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/what-you-can-and-cant-do-under-rules) at work, home and when out.

Do I need the COVID-19 vaccine if I've had the flu vaccine?

Yes. You should have the COVID-19 vaccine even if you have had the flu vaccine, as the flu vaccine will not protect you from COVID-19. The flu vaccine should generally be given at least two weeks before or after a COVID vaccine course.

Will I be able to access my vaccination record?

All COVID-19 vaccinations will be recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR). This is a mandatory requirement under national legislation. People who have received a COVID-19 vaccine can see a record of their vaccination online from the Medicare, MyGov or MyHealthRecord sites.

- Medicare online account: https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/medicare-online-accounts

- MyGov:https://my.gov.au/LoginServices/main/login?execution=e2s1

- MyHealthRecord: https://www.myhealthrecord.gov.au/for-you-your-family/howtos/log-in

Further information

Please read the relevant [COVID-19 vaccine product information](https://www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccine-pfizer-australia-comirnaty-bnt162b2-mrna) leaflet for more details on your vaccine, including possible side effects.
https://www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccine-pfizer-australia-comirnaty-bnt162b2-mrna

Australian Government COVID-19 resources are available at:
https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-vaccination-advice-for-covid-19-vaccine-providers

You should discuss any concerns you have about COVID-19 vaccination with your normal health care provider or vaccination provider before you attend your appointment to receive the vaccine where possible.