

Is the Covid-19 vaccine safe?

COVID-19 vaccines needed to be rolled out quickly, but that does not mean safety was compromised. The Pfizer vaccine we are using in New Zealand is held to the same high safety standards as any other medicine. COVID-19 vaccines are the most well-studied vaccines ever made. Nearly 50% of the world's population have had a COVID-19 vaccine, and more than 3 million people in Aotearoa have had their first Pfizer vaccine. This means we have lots of data to show the Pfizer vaccine has been thoroughly assessed for safety.

How was the vaccine created so quickly?

There are many reasons COVID-19 vaccines were able to be made quickly.

- Scientists had a head start because of all the research already carried out on related viruses.
- Governments, private companies and funding agencies have spent a lot of money. This means more could be done in a short space of time.
- Researchers and governments from different countries shared information and worked together.
- More people than usual volunteered for clinical trials. Some clinical trials were done at the same time, instead of one after another.
- Large manufacturing plants were built so more vaccines can be made faster than was possible before.
- Researchers could show the vaccine worked sooner than usual, because there are so many cases of COVID-19.
- What you need to know about the Pfizer vaccine

Is it safe if you are pregnant or breastfeeding?

If you are pregnant

- Pregnant women who get COVID-19 are more likely to get seriously ill, so it is a good idea to get vaccinated.
- Millions of pregnant people have been vaccinated around the world. Data shows no evidence that the vaccine is associated with an increased risk of miscarriage during pregnancy, and no additional safety concerns have been raised.
- The vaccine protects you as you are far less likely to fall seriously ill. It also protects your baby as there is evidence that babies can get antibodies through the placenta that help protect them from COVID-19.
- The Pfizer vaccine does not contain a live virus or any ingredients that are harmful to pregnant people or their babies.

If you are breastfeeding

- Studies show there are no additional safety concerns or issues with continuing to breastfeed after vaccination.
- Breastfeeding supports the development of a healthy immune system, and if you are vaccinated against COVID-19, there is evidence that you can provide extra protection for your baby through antibodies in your breastmilk.

Can the vaccine affect fertility?

- No, the Pfizer vaccine will not affect your genes or fertility.
- The mRNA from the vaccine does not enter the nucleus of any cells, which is where your DNA is.
- COVID-19 vaccines and Fertility – IMAC([external link](#))

Is it safe if you have a health condition?

- The Pfizer vaccine has been thoroughly assessed for safety for people with underlying health conditions.
- You are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated if you have a condition like cancer, diabetes, kidney disease or heart disease. This is because if you catch COVID-19, you are more likely to get seriously ill and end up in hospital.
- You cannot get the Pfizer vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to an ingredient in the vaccine.
- If you have any questions or concerns, talk to your doctor before getting vaccinated.
- Vaccine advice if you have a health condition

Is it safe for children?

- Young people aged 12 to 15 became eligible for the Pfizer vaccine in August 2021.
- The vaccine was approved for this age group by Medsafe who is responsible for approving the use of all medicines and vaccines in New Zealand. The Ministry of Health also received advice from science experts in the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group.
- Medsafe only gives consent for using a vaccine in Aotearoa once they are satisfied it has met strict standards for safety, efficacy and quality.
- A large number of people ages 12 to 15 have now been vaccinated around the world, and no additional safety concerns have been raised.

Can I get the vaccine if I am sick?

- If you are unwell on the day of your appointment, you will need to reschedule it. You can be vaccinated once you are well again.
- If you have symptoms of COVID-19, get a test and stay at home until you get your results. You can be vaccinated once you have a negative test.

Will the vaccine protect me from COVID-19?

Getting vaccinated means you are far less likely to get really sick and have to go to hospital if you catch COVID-19. You are also less likely to pass COVID-19 on to other people. Studies show that 95% of people who have received 2 doses of the vaccine are protected against getting COVID-19 symptoms.

Can I still get COVID-19 if I have the vaccine?

- Getting 2 doses of the Pfizer vaccine means you are much less likely to catch COVID-19, including the Delta variant.
- As with any vaccine, the Pfizer vaccine may not fully protect everyone who gets it. However, if you do catch COVID-19, the vaccine will give you a high degree of protection from serious illness. This means you could have no COVID-19 symptoms, or will have much fewer, milder symptoms, and recover faster.

Can you pass COVID-19 onto other people if you are vaccinated?

- We know it is a lot harder for the virus to spread between people who are vaccinated. To be safe, however, we must assume there is still a risk of transmission.
- This is why it is important to continue taking extra safety measures, such as wearing a mask and washing your hands regularly, after you have been vaccinated.

What does provisional approval of the vaccine mean?

- The Pfizer vaccine has been provisionally approved by New Zealand's medicines safety authority, Medsafe.
- This means it has met international standards for quality, safety and efficacy, and Pfizer must provide ongoing data to Medsafe.
- The main parts of the clinical trials are complete, and Pfizer is continuing to monitor the long-term use of the vaccine until 2023.
- It is not unusual for medicines to have provisional approval before the end of clinical trials. A common example is anti-cancer medicines.
- Medsafe will continue to check that the safety of the vaccine is the same as seen in the clinical trials. This is the same process for all medicines being used in New Zealand.

Why do I need 2 doses, and when should I get my second dose?

For the best protection, it is important to get 2 doses of the vaccine

- Both doses of the Pfizer vaccine are the same, but the second dose increases your protection. This means you get better and likely longer-lasting immunity from 2 doses than from a single dose.

The standard gap between doses is now 3 weeks or more

- In August, we extended the standard gap between first and second doses of the Pfizer vaccine from 3 to 6 weeks. This allowed us to give 1 dose (partial protection) to a larger number of people faster.
- Since then, the Delta outbreak has increased the risk of contracting COVID-19 for everyone in New Zealand, no matter where you are in the country.
- Because of this increased risk, we are now advising all New Zealanders to consider a shorter gap of 3 weeks between their 2 doses, instead of the standard 6 weeks. Reducing this gap means more people can be fully vaccinated sooner, increasing our community immunity.
- The minimum gap between doses will continue to be 21 days.

Does the vaccine work against Delta?

- Data from England shows that 2 doses of the Pfizer vaccine is highly effective against the Delta variant.
- Evidence shows that those who had been fully vaccinated with 2 doses of the Pfizer vaccine and became infected with the Delta variant were still well-protected against severe disease.

Unite
against
COVID-19

