

# COVID-19 and the vaccination process

We have been living with a changing and often challenging new environment for a while now. However, you may still have questions about SARS-CoV-2 and whether Pick n Pay Medical Scheme will cover the cost of the vaccination. You may also need some counselling support to manage all the change. To support our members, we have started creating a list of commonly asked questions about the spread of COVID-19, vaccines and the vaccination process, and answered them below.

### Why go for my vaccine?

Experts have warned that unvaccinated persons are potential factories for new variants of the virus, as well as multiplication of the virus.

Medical research demonstrates that vaccines are safe, reduce individual risk and represent the most reliable route to fast-tracking our return to normality.

If you haven't already been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, we urge you to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Please continue practising sensible physical distancing, wearing of masks and proper washing and sanitising of your hands.

**Protect yourself, your family and others from the disruption and complications of COVID-19 and GET VACCINATED!**

Click [here](#) for more on overcoming vaccine hesitancy.

### Are COVID-19 vaccines effective against the latest Omicron variant?

While the Omicron variant is highly transmissible, indications are that the vaccines are effective to protect from severe illness and death.





### **When is medical help required for COVID-19 symptoms?**

Patients experiencing shortness of breath, breathing difficulty, chest pain or who are unable to speak or move, should seek emergency medical care.

Unsure if your COVID-19 symptoms require medical care? Contact Hello Doctor to get guidance from a medical doctor.

Remember that an oximeter reading dropping below 90 should be managed as a medical emergency. Call your family practitioner for advice. You can also call ER24 if there are signs of respiratory distress.

### **Can a person who is infected with COVID-19, without visible symptoms, spread the virus?**

Yes. It has been estimated most new infections originate from individuals with infection, but no symptoms. These individuals will mostly be unaware that they are infected.

### **What is the difference between 'quarantine' and 'isolation'?**

- **Quarantine** separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to an infected person to see if they become sick.
- **Isolation** separates sick people with confirmed COVID-19 infection from people who are not sick.

### **How long should an exposed person quarantine for?**

The latest communication is that South Africa has moved to adjusted Alert Level 1. This means that those who test positive with no symptoms do not have to isolate. However, it is best for you to do so, as you may infect someone who has a compromised immune system.

The isolation period for a person who tests positive with symptoms has been reduced from 10 days to seven days. **Contacts do not have to isolate unless they develop symptoms.**

### **What is the current impact of the fourth wave of COVID-19?**

- The country has exited the fourth COVID-19 wave.
- The proportion of people with immunity to COVID-19 is reported to exceed 60% to 80%.
- Asymptomatic positive cases no longer need to isolate and the isolation period for symptomatic positive cases has been reduced to seven days.
- Schools can return to daily attendance and resume fulltime learning.

### **Who is currently eligible for vaccination?**

All individuals over the age of 12 are eligible for vaccination.

The National Department of Health approved a second dose of the Pfizer vaccine for minors aged 12 to 17 on 9 December 2021. Individuals between 12 and 17 years, who have already had one dose of the vaccine, can receive their second dose at least 42 days after the first jab.

### **Can minors show up for vaccination unaccompanied?**

Yes. A minor can opt to get vaccinated at any vaccination site without being accompanied by an adult; however, they must be registered on the Electronic Vaccine Data System (EVDS).

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (as amended by Act 41 of 2007) permits children older than 12 to obtain medical treatment (including vaccination) without the consent of an adult, if they understand the scope of treatment and understand and acknowledge the risks and benefits associated with such treatment.

### **How do I register on the Government's EVDS?**

Everyone over the age of 12 can register on the EVDS to receive their vaccine.

Below are the various ways to register:

- Online by clicking [here](#)
- Using the WhatsApp 0600 123 456
- Via SMS by dialling \*134\*832#
- Calling the COVID-19 hotline on 0800 029 999.

### **Can I choose when I would like to receive my vaccine once I have registered on the EVDS?**

Once registered, you can choose at which vaccination site to receive your vaccine. For a full list of all the vaccination sites, you can visit <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/active-vaccination-sites/>.

### **What will I need to take with me to the vaccination site?**

On the day of your vaccination, you should have with you:

- your ID/birth certificate/passport or any other formal identification document
- the voucher you would have received via SMS when you registered
- your medical scheme membership card.

### **How do I obtain my digital vaccination certificate?**

If you have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, you can download your digital vaccination certificate online at <https://vaccine.certificate.health.gov.za/>. You will need your ID or passport number, cell phone number and vaccination code to access your certificate. For help, please call the National COVID-19 helpline on 0800 029 999 or send a WhatsApp to 0600 123 456.

### **Can I get vaccinated when pregnant or breastfeeding?**

Evidence supports vaccination of pregnant and lactating mothers, but please discuss your options with your doctor or vaccination centre before getting vaccinated.

## **Additional vaccine doses: What you need to know!**



### **What is an additional vaccine dose?**

An additional vaccine dose is also commonly referred to as a booster shot.

### **Who can have an additional vaccine dose?**

- 12 to 17-year-olds: **42 days after their first jab**
- Immunocompromised adults: **28 days after their second jab**
- Individuals who received their Johnson & Johnson vaccine two months ago or their second Pfizer vaccine three months ago

## When is the best time to have an additional vaccine dose?



### **If you had the Pfizer vaccine:**

Individuals over the age of 18 years who have received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine will be eligible to receive a booster dose of the same vaccine or a booster dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine 90 days after receiving the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine.

Individuals aged 12 to 17: an additional dose 42 days or more after your first jab. Thereafter, an additional shot will be required again six months after your second shot has been administered.



### **If you had the Johnson & Johnson vaccine:**

Individuals older than 18 years who have received one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine will be eligible to receive a booster dose of the same vaccine or a booster dose of the Pfizer vaccine after 60 days.



### **Immunocompromised individuals:**

If you're an adult undergoing treatment for any of the conditions below, you're considered immunocompromised and can have an additional dose of the vaccine 28 days after your last vaccine dose.

- Haematological or immune malignancy
- Moderate to severe primary immunodeficiency disorder
- HIV infection with a CD4 count of fewer than 200 cells/ $\mu$ L within the last six months
- Asplenia
- Individuals receiving high-dose corticosteroids or systemic biologics
- Long-term renal dialysis
- Transplant recipients (solid organ or bone marrow)

Please note that you will need a **referral note from your healthcare provider** to get this additional dose.

**NOTE:** If you are not immunocompromised, you will not require a referral note and may go for your additional vaccine dose once you qualify for it.