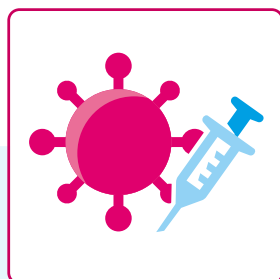# Getting vaccinated against COVID-19

It's your choice, so make sure you're well-informed

More information:

Geldrop-Mierlo.nl/Corona

In 2021 everyone aged 18 and over in the Netherlands will be invited to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Being vaccinated will protect not only you, but also your family, friends and vulnerable people in your surroundings. Once the majority of people are immune to coronavirus, there won't have to be so many coronavirus restrictions.

This brochure gives important information about vaccination against COVID-19 for everyone who will shortly be given the option of vaccination.

- How it works
- Safety
- Development
- Vaccine side effects
- Types of vaccine
- Why getting vaccinated is important
- Invitation
- Order of vaccination
- Coronavirus rules

How it works

Your body makes antibodies

The first COVID-19 vaccines to be approved for use on the European market were developed by BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna. These vaccines contain mRNA, which makes your body produce a protein that looks like a coronavirus protein. Your immune system gets triggered by this protein and makes antibodies against coronavirus. So if you come into contact with coronavirus in the future, you'll be protected by those antibodies and will be very unlikely to get COVID-19.

The mRNA in the vaccine is broken down naturally by your body. mRNA vaccines can't get into your DNA. So they can never change anything in your genes.

The BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna are about 95% effective. This means people who have been vaccinated are 95% less likely to get COVID-19 than people who haven't been vaccinated. Not everybody reacts to vaccines in the same way. Some people still get ill, even if they've been vaccinated. But when that happens, their symptoms are less severe. The vaccines have also proved effective for people in higher-risk groups.

More vaccines made by various manufacturers are to be authorised for the European market. To find out more, go to www.coronavaccinatie.nl.

Even if you've had COVID-19, it's still good to get vaccinated. Because having had the disease once doesn't mean you can't get it again.

Safety

Vaccine safety is paramount

Every vaccine that is approved for use has first been tested on tens of thousands of people. COVID-19 vaccines have to meet the same strict safety standards as all other vaccines. The manufacturers of COVID-19 vaccines have to go through the same procedure to make a vaccine and get it approved. So we know that these vaccines are safe and that they offer good protection against the virus. It's not certain exactly how long this protection lasts. This is something that still needs to be researched. Just like with any other vaccine or medicine, there's always a risk of side effects. But it's rare for vaccination to cause serious reactions.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the Medicines Evaluation Board (CBG) assess all COVID-19 vaccines in terms of:
- safety
- effectiveness
- quality.

Health Council of the Netherlands

The Health Council also checks to see whether a vaccine meets all the requirements and is suitable for the target groups in question.

Development

Rapid vaccine development isn't compromising safety

COVID-19 vaccines are being developed faster than generally happens with vaccines. But the strict safety standards continue to apply. There are a number of reasons why these vaccines could be developed so quickly:
- All over the world, large numbers of researchers are working together to produce safe COVID-19 vaccines.
- Researchers are also carrying out the different stages of clinical trials simultaneously, rather than consecutively. That saves time.
- These vaccines are also being assessed more speedily: regulatory authorities are being given access to interim research results.

So the development of COVID-19 vaccines follows the same procedure as any other vaccine, just more quickly.

Vaccine side effects

Chance of short-term side effects

You can experience side effects after receiving any vaccine, including COVID-19 vaccines. That's because the vaccine activates the body's immune system. This builds up protection against coronavirus, but it can also lead to mild symptoms. These go away within 1 to 3 days, just as with flu vaccinations.
The following side effects are common:

- soreness at the injection site
- headache
- fatigue
- muscle ache
- mild fever

If you feel uncomfortable or have a high fever, you can take paracetamol.

Small risk of adverse reactions

Very occasionally after being vaccinated, someone can get an adverse reaction that hasn't occurred before. But long-term side effects are rare, because your body breaks down the vaccine within a few weeks. The vaccine then leaves your body naturally.

If you've been vaccinated and experience a reaction that isn't mild or doesn't go away quickly, report this at www.mijnbijwerking.nl (website in Dutch).

Types of vaccine

More than one suitable vaccine

Since the beginning of 2021, COVID-19 vaccines have been available from various manufacturers. Experts are looking closely at who should get which vaccine. This partly depends on which vaccine is best suited to a particular target group. For example, some vaccines work very well for older people or people with certain medical conditions. Where possible, vaccines will be given to the groups for whom they are most suitable.

A registration system will record which vaccine you were given. People need a second dose of the same vaccine for full protection against COVID-19. So registration is important, not just to invite people to get their second dose, but also to know how many people have already been vaccinated and whether the vaccine is effective and safe.
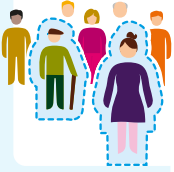
Why getting vaccinated is important

Vaccination makes it harder for the virus to spread

In the first place, vaccination protects you, but ultimately it also protects your family, friends and vulnerable people in your surroundings. The more people who get vaccinated, the harder it will be for the virus to spread. Then the government can scale down the coronavirus restrictions and we'll get more and more of our freedom back.

Some people don't want to be vaccinated, either because of their beliefs or because they're worried about side effects.

If you have questions about your own specific situation, discuss them with your doctor.

Order of vaccination

Health Council has advised on who to vaccinate first

Not everybody can be vaccinated at once. To protect the most vulnerable in society and relieve the pressure on healthcare services, a start was made in January 2021 on vaccinating the following groups:

- Acute care hospital staff (staff working in intensive care units, A&E departments and on COVID-19 wards) and ambulance crews, who are directly involved in the care and treatment of COVID-19 patients.
- Care professionals working in nursing homes, small-scale residential homes and disability care homes, district nurses and social support workers.
- Nursing home residents and residents of homes for people with intellectual disabilities.

Plans for vaccinating subsequent groups will depend on factors like approval, effectiveness and delivery of vaccines. For the most recent vaccination timetable go to www.coronavaccinatie.nl.

Invitation

When it's your turn to be vaccinated, you'll get an invitation

When it's time for your population group to be vaccinated, you'll get an invitation, either by letter or email. It will say what you have to take with you (such as your ID). It will also tell you where you can get the vaccination. This could be at a large vaccination centre run by the municipal health service (GGD), at your doctor's office or, for instance, in a nursing home.

Vaccination is voluntary

Whether or not you get vaccinated is your choice. In other words, vaccination is not compulsory. Make sure that you're well-informed, so you can make the right choice.

Good to know:

- Vaccination is free.
- You get the shot in your upper arm.
- The vaccine consists of two doses: you get the second dose several weeks after the first one.
- Make a new appointment if you
    - are ill or feverish shortly before the appointment;
    - if you have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19);
    - if you've missed your appointment to be vaccinated.
- Ask your doctor whether you can have the vaccine if you
    - have a weak immune system, because of a medical condition or the medication you're on;
    - take blood thinners or have a medical condition that means your blood doesn't clot very well;
    - have previously had a serious allergic reaction to a vaccine component.

Coronavirus rules

Keep following the rules

A start has now been made on vaccination. But we still all need to follow the basic coronavirus rules:

- stay 1.5 metres away from others;
- wear a facemask in public indoor spaces;
- avoid busy places.

Even if you've already been vaccinated, it's important to follow the rules. Because the virus is still around, and vaccination doesn't provide 100% protection.

If you get symptoms of coronavirus disease despite having been vaccinated, get yourself tested. The chance that you'll get COVID-19 is very small, but you can still get infected.

28 Januari 2021

If you have any more questions,

go to www.coronavaccinatie.nl or call 0800 1351.