

FACT SHEET

VACCINATIONS ARE #OURBESTSHOT

MHR believes that vaccines present our best chance of overcoming the overwhelming impact of the pandemic on our daily lives. By vaccinating, we are strongly protecting ourselves against infection, severe disease or death, as well as protecting those around us who are vulnerable.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines initiate a 'training programme' for your immune cells, stimulating the body in the same way an infection would, training it how to recognise and fight the virus. The vaccine does not infect you with COVID-19 but helps your body to recognise the virus by introducing inactive parts of the virus to train the immune system. Vaccines have already been used to prevent more than 25 life-threatening diseases over many years, including tetanus and measles.

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

All vaccines, including the COVID-19 options, 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 a specific disease, are designed to identify any common side effects or other safety concerns. For COVID-19 testing, no steps in the process were skipped, but some of these processes were completed within shorter time frames by benefitting from previous work on vaccines, worldwide financial support and shared knowledge.

Once a clinical trial shows that a vaccine is safe and effective, a series of independent reviews of the efficacy and safety evidence is required. This includes regulatory review and approval in the country where the vaccine is manufactured. Only then will the World Health Organization (WHO) consider a vaccine product for prequalification.

By the start of July 2021, 854 million people have been fully vaccinated against the virus, with 3 billion doses having been administered.

Do COVID-19 vaccines really work?

COVID-19 vaccines prevent serious illness and death. We have seen through evidence across the world, as well in our own country, that this is having a positive impact on the health of our staff. According to the Sisonke Trial feedback, of those healthcare workers who experienced breakthrough infections, 94% were mild, meaning their symptoms were not as severe and did not require hospitalisation. Johnson & Johnson have also recently confirmed that their vaccine is 85% effective on the new Delta variant. Very encouraging news!

Will the Johnson & Johnson vaccine protect me against the Delta variant?

Yes. The vaccine has shown good results in laboratory testing, and it is thought to be more effective against the Delta variant than it is against the Beta variant – and we know from a large clinical trial that efficacy against the Beta variant was already high. Additionally, in South Africa's recent Sisonke trial, 99% of the more than 470 000 high-risk healthcare workers who received the vaccine reported being COVID-19 free. Among the one percent that reported contracting SARS-CoV-2 in the months after vaccination, nine out of 10 cases were mild, according to a statement released in late June by the study.

BREAKING THE MYTHS AND FAKE NEWS

The vaccine contains chips or tracking devices: This is untrue, and there is no evidence to support the fake stories in this regard. Vaccine manufacturers are required to declare their ingredients to regulators, such as SAHPRA, before the vaccine is approved for use. Despite rumours on social media, the vaccines do not carry microchips or any other tracking devices. Let us support our community by not sharing false or alarming stories but rather providing them with facts to ensure they are well-informed.

BREAKING THE MYTHS AND FAKE NEWS CONTINUE

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The vaccine will give me COVID-19: This is untrue. The vaccine cannot infect you with the virus causing COVID-19. None of the COVID-19 vaccines anticipated for use in South Africa uses a live virus that causes COVID-19. The vaccine stimulates your immune system to produce antibodies, which fight the virus when it enters your body. This immune system response may trigger mild side effects, but these are evidence of your system fighting. You can only test positive if you get infected (no vaccine is 100% effective in preventing infection).

Vaccines change your DNA: This is also untrue. The vaccines such as Pfizer contain mRNA (a messenger RNA), which carries instructions from your DNA to your proteins. After the mRNA has performed its function, it is absorbed into the muscle cells and is broken down or degraded. There is no change to your DNA. By accepting the vaccine, we can protect ourselves, our families, and community members unable to receive the vaccine.

Once I have been vaccinated, I do not need to wear a mask or take precautions: Once you have been vaccinated, continue to observe all the necessary precautions. Immunity takes up to 14 days after a single dose or 14 days after vaccines requiring a two-dose regime. While a vaccine does protect us from a serious infection, we may still carry the virus. So taking precautions is also important to protect others. Regulations regarding masking may change when a greater proportion of the population has been vaccinated, and the virus is not as prevalent in our community. Until then, we need to continue taking precautions for ourselves and those around us.

I have had COVID-19, so I do not need to be vaccinated: Current evidence demonstrates that natural immunity does not provide long-term protection against the virus, especially different variants. The Centre for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that those who have had COVID-19 still get the vaccine. Preliminary evidence shows that the vaccine offers better protection than having had the virus. Let us strengthen our community's immunity by encouraging all to accept the vaccine.

Big business is pushing vaccines to maximise profits: In contrast, the pandemic has caused massive financial strain on most industries. The core focus for vaccination is to save lives and to reduce the pressure on hospitals where patients suffer severe infections. Business and government are strongly encouraging vaccine manufacturers to facilitate timely delivery for this reason.

THE GOOD NEWS ON VACCINATIONS

Vaccination centres

There are currently more than 570 vaccine sites in South Africa, with the updated list published by the Department of Health: <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/active-vaccination-sites/>

HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

If you are eligible for a vaccine, register via any of the available channels to receive your vaccine. This will protect you against serious illness or possible death and will also keep others around you safe. If you have already received your vaccine, please share the need for vaccination with those you encounter. Let us bust the myths and share the knowledge that will keep our community safe!