



COVID-19 Vaccine: Clinical Questions



Photo Credit: Vatican News

"Vaccines for all, especially for the most vulnerable and needy of all regions of the planet."

- Pope Francis, January 2021

We hope these resources will be helpful when responding to questions about COVID-19 vaccines in your local churches and communities. Information included on vaccines is based on the latest scientific research and will continue to be updated as new information becomes available. For more information about COVID-19 vaccines, please speak with your local health department or health care providers.

What is vaccination and why is it important?

- **Vaccination is a simple, safe and effective way of protecting people against harmful diseases** using the body's natural defenses to build resistance to dangerous infections.
- Different types of vaccines work in different ways to provide protection. Vaccines train your immune system to create antibodies—just as it does when it is exposed to a disease—but they do not cause the disease or put you at risk of its complications.
- Vaccination is a safe and effective way to prevent disease and save lives. Today, there are vaccines that protect against at least 20 diseases, saving the lives of up to 3 million people every year. When we get vaccinated, we are not just protecting ourselves but are also protecting those around us. Because some people cannot get vaccinated due to health conditions or other reasons and are advised not to get certain vaccines, they depend on the rest of us to get vaccinated to reduce the spread of disease.

More information about the importance of vaccines is available [here](#)

How do vaccines work and how do they protect individuals and communities?

- **Vaccines reduce risks of getting a disease** by working with your body's natural defenses to build protection. Rather than treating a disease after it occurs, vaccines usually prevent us in the first instance from getting sick.
- 'Herd immunity'—also known as 'population immunity'—is the protection we can get from an infectious disease that happens when immunity develops in enough of the population either through vaccination or through previous infection. Achieving herd immunity through vaccination is safe and saves lives.

How are vaccines developed and tested, and what is in them?

- **Every vaccine must go through extensive and rigorous testing** to ensure it is safe before it can be introduced in a country. An experimental vaccine is first tested in animals to assess its safety and potential to prevent disease. It is then tested in a number of human clinical trials, which are rigorously reviewed before a vaccine may be introduced into a national immunization programme.
- Following the introduction of a vaccine, close monitoring continues to check for any unexpected adverse side effects and to review the vaccine's ongoing effectiveness.
- Vaccine ingredients listed on labels can look unfamiliar, but we naturally have many of them in the body and in the environment. All of the ingredients in vaccines—as well as the vaccines themselves—are thoroughly tested and monitored to ensure they and the quantities in which they are used are safe.





Photos Courtesy of Vatican COVID-19 Commission

Why should people get vaccinated, including with the COVID-19 vaccine?

- **Two key reasons to get vaccinated are to protect ourselves and to protect those around us**, as part of loving your neighbour. Without vaccines, we and those around us, especially those who are most vulnerable, are at risk of serious illness from diseases, including COVID-19.
- Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine should be understood as an act of charity toward other members of our community. We should keep in mind that some people cannot themselves be vaccinated; they must rely on the rest of the community to become immune through vaccination so that the disease does not travel through the community and infect them. In this way, being vaccinated safely against COVID-19 should be considered an act of love for our neighbour and part of our moral responsibility for the common good.
- In today's world, infectious diseases can easily cross borders and infect anyone who is not protected. This means no one is safe until everyone is safe in a pandemic.

Are vaccines safe, including the COVID-19 vaccines?

- **Vaccination, through rigorously tested vaccines, is safe**, and side effects from a vaccine are usually minor and temporary, such as a sore arm or mild fever. More serious side effects are possible, but these side effects are extremely rare.
- Scientists constantly monitor information for any sign that a vaccine may cause health risks. The benefits of vaccination greatly outweigh the risks, and many more illnesses and deaths would occur without vaccines.

Does the fact that the COVID-19 vaccines were developed quickly affect their safety?

- Scientists were able to develop COVID-19 vaccines quickly because many phases of vaccine development happened at the same time, not because safety standards were overlooked.
- COVID-19 vaccines undergo the same number of trials and are subject to the same safety checks and independent assessment as other vaccines. They are also carefully monitored after their approval and application to ensure they continue to meet effectiveness and strict safety standards.
- The development of COVID-19 vaccines are also informed by years of research about similar viruses and vaccine development and manufacturing. Scientists are collaborating and sharing research like never before.
- For more information, visit: [The World Health Organization](https://www.who.int).

What COVID-19 vaccines are currently available?

- The scientific and vaccine manufacturing communities around the world have been working faster than ever to develop and produce vaccines that can protect people against COVID-19 and help end this crisis. Since the emergence of this new coronavirus, several vaccines have been approved and started to be rolled out. Most countries have their own national regulatory authority that decides whether a vaccine is appropriate for use in their territory. Check with your country's health department to find out which vaccines are approved and which are available for use in your country.
- Other entities, such as the World Health Organization, the European Union and national regulatory agencies, update the latest vaccine developments on a regular basis.



Are there side effects from vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccines?

- Like any medicine, vaccines can cause mild side effects, such as a low-grade fever, or pain or redness at the site where the injection was given. Mild reactions go away within a few days on their own. Severe or long-lasting side effects are extremely rare.
- There have been some reports of non-life-threatening allergic reactions to specific COVID-19 vaccines, but public health authorities are able to provide local advice to those experiencing reactions.



Will I be protected as soon as I have a COVID-19 vaccine?

- Some vaccines require individuals to receive two injections. Some require only one injection. It may take a week or two for your body to build up some protection from the first dose of vaccine. For those that require a second dose, maximum protection will not start until a couple of weeks after your second dose.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine protect me from new variants and strains of the Coronavirus?

- More studies are needed to understand how new variants may affect the effectiveness of existing COVID-19 vaccines. The World Health Organization has been tracking variants since the beginning of the global COVID-19 outbreak in January 2020. Systems have been set up to quickly identify and study emerging variants. The World Health Organization is keeping countries and the public informed as they learn more about the variants. For more information, please see the [Disease Outbreak News](#) for an overview of Coronavirus variants and an updated [Q&A](#) on virus evolution.



Photos Courtesy of Vatican COVID-19 Commission

Will I still need to follow physical distancing and hygiene measures if I have a COVID-19 vaccine?

- While vaccines can protect you from severe forms of COVID-19, we do not know yet how effective they will be at preventing transmission. Therefore, you should continue to wear a mask, wash your hands regularly and keep your distance from others for as long as your government or local authorities recommend.
- If you live or work in crowded conditions and where safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are lacking, you should continue to be extra careful. This applies equally to resident populations and to refugees and internally displaced persons in humanitarian settings.

Will COVID-19 vaccines provide long-term protection?

- It is too early to know if COVID-19 vaccines will provide long-term protection. As vaccines are rolled out globally and studies continue, we will be able to learn more about how long this protection lasts.

Will other vaccines help protect me against COVID-19?

- Currently, there is no evidence that existing vaccines or treatments for other diseases (e.g., malaria pills) will protect against COVID-19. To be protected, you need to get one of the authorised COVID-19 vaccines and continue practicing physical distancing and hygiene measures.

More information about COVID-19 vaccine development is available from [The World Health Organization](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).