

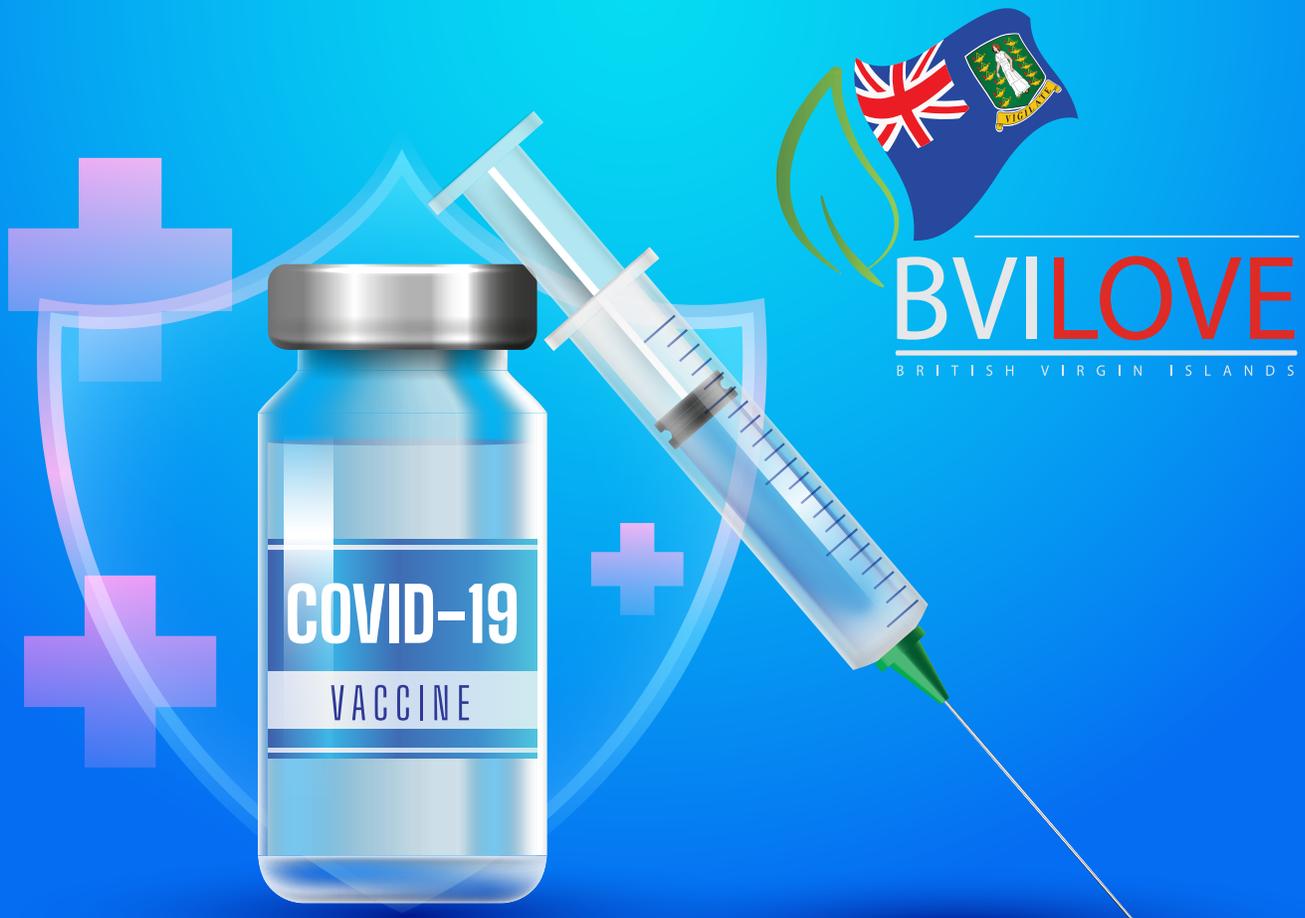
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COVID-19 Vaccine

in the **British Virgin Islands**

Frequently Asked Questions





The implementation of the COVID-19 Vaccine would lessen the health, economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. A vaccine for COVID-19 is a critical tool for helping to bring the pandemic under control when combined with effective testing and existing prevention measures.

This information has been compiled to answer the most important questions and concerns that residents and visitors may have regarding the COVID-19 vaccination programme in the British Virgin Islands.

Read the Frequently Asked Questions below:

What are the benefits in taking the COVID-19 vaccine?

Getting vaccinated is one of many steps you can take to protect yourself and others from the symptoms of the COVID-19 illness. Protection from COVID-19 is critically important because it can cause severe illness or death for some people.

Stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines work with your immune system so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Other steps, like masks and social distancing, help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following public health recommendations to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from COVID-19.

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

The COVID-19 vaccines currently approved have been thoroughly reviewed by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (the MHRA). The regulatory team has completed a full review of the safety information reported from the trials, which includes several months follow-up data from 23,000 people for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine and 44,000 people for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

These vaccines have been developed so quickly; how do I know that they have been tested properly?

The COVID-19 pandemic led to an international effort in vaccine development. The urgent need to control the pandemic, and save lives, meant that development processes were significantly accelerated. This does not mean that steps were skipped, or that safety was compromised.



Do the COVID-19 vaccines contain human or animal products?

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines do not contain any human or animal derived ingredients.

How do the vaccines work?

Vaccines are all designed to teach the body's immune system to safely recognise and block the virus that causes COVID-19. Several different types of vaccines for COVID-19 have been developed, or are in development including: inactivated or weakened virus vaccines, which use a form of the virus that has been inactivated or weakened so it doesn't cause disease, but still generates an immune response; protein-based vaccines, which use harmless fragments of proteins or protein shells that mimic the COVID-19 virus to safely generate an immune response; viral vector vaccines, which use a virus that has been genetically engineered so that it can't cause disease but produces Coronavirus proteins to safely generate an immune response; and RNA and DNA vaccines, a cutting-edge approach that uses genetically engineered RNA or DNA to generate a protein that itself safely prompts an immune response.

AstraZeneca is a viral vector vaccine.

How do COVID-19 Vaccines Work?

COVID-19 vaccines help our bodies develop immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19 without us having to get the illness. Different types of vaccines work in different ways to offer protection, but with all types of vaccines, the body is left with a supply of "memory" T-lymphocytes as well as B-lymphocytes that will remember how to fight that virus in the future.

It typically takes a few weeks for the body to produce T-lymphocytes and B-lymphocytes after vaccination. Therefore, it is possible that a person could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination and then get sick because the vaccine did not have enough time to provide protection.

Sometimes after vaccination, the process of building immunity can cause symptoms, such as fever. These symptoms are normal and are a sign that the body is building immunity.

Will I be offered a choice of vaccine?

At this time, only the AstraZeneca Vaccine is available in the Territory. This, however, could change as other vaccines are authorised for use and vaccine supplies increase.

How does the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine compare to other vaccines in terms of efficacy?

Preliminary data indicates that the vaccine is 70.4% effective. 70.4% is highly effective – more effective than the average flu vaccine. We’re going to need a range of vaccines, and in due course we’ll know which vaccines are most effective for different ages, and populations. The most important thing is to get people vaccinated, as this will help to bring the virus under control and prevent people from becoming severely ill.

How will the BVI’s COVID-19 Vaccination programme be rolled out?

The COVID-19 vaccination programme will be rolled in a phased approach as outlined below:

- Phase 1 Healthcare and frontline workers
- Phase 2 People with underlying conditions that put them at risk of severe COVID-19 disease or death, and persons over 60 years.
- Phase 3 Essential workers at high risk of exposure (eg. teachers, school staff, workers and persons in homecare, shelters, prisoners and prison staff, and hospitality workers)
- Phase 4 Young adults
- Phase 5 All remaining residents over the age of 18 years

How will the vaccine ‘feel’ when I receive it?

Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine are given as a two-dose course. They are given as an injection into the upper arm, similar to other vaccines you receive as an adult. Most people feel a slight sting and a sensation of pressure when the vaccine is being given. The vaccine won’t feel cold.

Is vaccination against COVID-19 mandatory?

Everybody is encouraged to receive the COVID-19 vaccination, but it is NOT mandatory. Any immunisation procedure, regardless of whether it has been approved by WHO or endorsed by the Territory, should be based on the recipient’s informed consent. It is recommended that persons obtain comprehensive information/briefing from their healthcare provider in order to be able to exercise an informed decision about whether or not to take the vaccine.

Will I have to pay for the vaccine?

Persons will be able to access the vaccine from private and public healthcare centres. Vaccination is free of charge at all distribution points to patients and to the National Health Insurance.



How many doses of vaccine have to be taken and at what time interval?

COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca is injected into a muscle (usually in the upper arm). You will receive two injections six weeks apart.

Will the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine become like the flu vaccine, and I'll need it every year?

At this point we're unable to say, but other vaccines of this type are shown to produce an immune response lasting for a year or more.

When can I expect to receive my vaccination?

Vaccine Administration will commence on February 11, 2021 with priority groups. Interested persons who fall into the priority groups should register on <https://ministryofhealth.gov.vg/vaccine>

Vaccines will be available from public and private medical facilities as well as through vaccination campaigns.

Additional information will be communicated as soon as it becomes available on bvi.gov.vg/covid-19

What can I do now to help protect myself from getting COVID-19 as I wait for my vaccination?

Persons can continue to reduce their chances of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others by wearing face masks and shields, washing hands regularly, staying at least 6 feet away from others and avoiding crowded areas with poor ventilation.

Can I get sick with COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. None of the current vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. This means that a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19. However, as with all other vaccines, you may have some side effects, which are normal signs that your body is building immune protection. Common side effects observed with the COVID-19 vaccines may include:

- On the arm where you receive the vaccine: pain and swelling;
- Throughout the rest of your body: fever, chills, tiredness, and headache.

These side effects may affect your ability to perform daily activities, but they should typically go away within a few days.

Can you guarantee that no-one will fall seriously ill or even die by taking the COVID-19 vaccines?

There are risks associated with any medicine, and the COVID-19 vaccine trials have not indicated that these vaccines lead to any unexpected reactions. Both licensed vaccines have a similar safety profile to other vaccines.

In any large trial of a new medicine, incidents are followed up rigorously with an independent group of safety experts. The research teams have collected large safety databases during their trials, and these were submitted to regulators for review. Trial volunteers are still being followed for any longer-term effects.

Is it safe to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I have an underlying medical condition?

COVID-19 vaccination is especially important for people with underlying health problems (e.g. heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancers, poor immunity and obesity). Such individuals are more likely to develop a severe form of COVID-19.



You should always consult with your health care provider if you have specific questions about the COVID-19 vaccine and your health. On very rare occasions, allergic reactions can occur. If you have had allergic reactions to any vaccines, drugs, medical products, foods etc. in the past, you should discuss the vaccination with your healthcare provider.

Children and adolescents

No data is currently available on the use of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca in children and adolescents younger than 18 years of age. Therefore the vaccine is not offered in this age group.

What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

If you are breastfeeding, pregnant or think you may be pregnant, or are planning to have a baby, tell your doctor. There is limited data on the use of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca in pregnant or breastfeeding women. Your doctor will discuss with you whether you can be given the vaccine.

Can COVID-19 vaccines affect fertility?

There is no evidence that the immune response to Coronaviruses has any impact on fertility in animals or humans, and there is no biological mechanism that has been shown to result in an impact on fertility. Regulators have looked at the data carefully from the clinical trials and have not recommended any precautions for individuals planning to become pregnant.

Driving and using machines

COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca has no known effect on the ability to drive and use machines. However, side effects may impact your ability to drive and use machines. If you feel unwell, do not drive or use machines.

Can I return to life as normal after I've been vaccinated?

For the time being, even after receiving the vaccine, you should continue to stay vigilant (wear a mask or face shield, wash your hands and maintain physical distancing) until the vast majority of the population is immune.

If I have already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get a COVID- 19 vaccine?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to you regardless of whether you have already had the COVID-19 infection. The protection from vaccination appears to provide a more effective protection.

However, those who are currently infected with COVID-19 should postpone vaccination until after their illness has run its course and after they have met their health authorities' criteria to discontinue isolation.

Additionally, current evidence suggests that re-infection with the virus that causes COVID-19 is uncommon in the 90 days after initial infection. Therefore, people with a recent infection may delay vaccination until the end of that 90-day period if desired.

After I am vaccinated, how long will vaccine immunity last?

Researchers do not yet know how long immunity lasts after vaccination. That is why continuation of public health preventive practices, e.g. wearing a mask, washing your hands regularly and physical distancing, will still be important until more is known.

Why should a vaccine be needed if we have other public health measures like physical distancing and wearing masks, to prevent COVID-19 from spreading?

Stopping a pandemic requires using all tools available, including:

- Acquiring immunity against COVID-19, naturally (by contracting the illness) or through vaccination.
- Avoiding contracting and spreading COVID-19 by respecting preventive measures like covering your mouth and nose with a mask and staying at least 6 feet (or depending on local health authorities' recommendations) away from others.
- Wearing of masks when you are in crowded settings, where you cannot be at least 6 feet from others and in rooms with poor or unknown ventilation.

Together, being vaccinated against COVID-19 along with following WHO's and other public health recommendations will offer the best protection from COVID-19 for yourself and those around you.

If I get a COVID-19 vaccine, will it cause a false positive for COVID-19 diagnostic testing (i.e. PCR or antigen tests)?

Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine will not cause a positive PCR or antigen laboratory test result since these specific tests check for active disease and not whether an individual is immune or not.

However, it should be noted that the antibody test (or "serology test") may be positive in someone who has been vaccinated, since that is a specific test that measures COVID-19 immunity in an individual.

For more information contact the Ministry of Health and Social Development by email at covid19vaccine@gov.vg or by calling 284-468-2286 or 284-468-2287.





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