

Vaccinations: safety and intended use

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Safety and protection of vaccines

Corona vaccines were developed according to the same regulatory requirements that apply to other medicinal products. Thanks to the vaccine, you will not get sick from corona. The available corona vaccines do not contain gelatine. You cannot choose which vaccine you will get.

Two good reasons to get vaccinated

1. Thanks to the vaccine, you will not get sick from corona. The vaccine activates your body's immune system to produce antibodies. Each vaccine is effective and has undergone rigorous testing for safety, reliability and quality.
2. Group immunity: if more than 70% of all people in Belgium are vaccinated, the virus will spread less quickly. That way, everyone will be protected.

Read more about the [available corona vaccines](#).

Corona vaccines are safe

Corona vaccines were developed according to the same regulatory requirements that apply to other medicinal products.

They have the same pharmaceutical quality, safety and efficacy.

Vaccine production always follows these steps:

1. The developer performs rigorous testing on the quality of the vaccine in terms of purity, ingredients and the manufacturing process.
2. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) and other regulators in EU/EEA countries perform a scientific evaluation of the vaccine.
3. The developer tests the vaccine's efficacy through laboratory research and animal testing.
4. If those trials have a favourable outcome, people (volunteers) test the vaccines:
 - during 3 clinical trial phases, with an increasing number of participants

- according to established procedures and protocols that:
 - the regulators have defined
 - were approved by the Medical Ethics Committee

5. After the testing programme, the developer submits the results to the European Medicines Agency (EMA). The EMA will not approve the vaccine until there is enough scientific evidence that the benefits outweigh the risks.

mRNA vaccines do not change your DNA

Studies show that genetic material from vaccines does not enter our DNA. The vaccine breaks down naturally after it has done its good work. Some vaccines use mRNA, but:

- It does not go near your own DNA.
- It is also so different from human DNA that it could do nothing even if it did come close.
- This mRNA is not long-lasting: within 10 hours of entering your body, it is already broken down in your cells.
- The technology is safe because it is not new. Research with RNA vaccines against cancer, Ebola and rabies, among other diseases, has been ongoing for about 20 years.

Long-term side effects

Science has had 200 years of experience with developing vaccines. And they know that major problems often surface quickly, within the first few weeks. We have already passed that period. So, the chances are slim that you would develop severe side effects months or years after being vaccinated.

Still, this can never be ruled out completely. This is true not only for the corona vaccine, but for all vaccines and medicines. That is why they keep a close eye on vaccines and medicines, even after they have been approved. A special monitoring system has been set up for the corona vaccine. That way, we can intervene quickly if necessary.

The difference with the production of other vaccines

1. The development and approval of the corona vaccine was prioritized at all levels due to the public health emergency and therefore the process was accelerated.
2. The different stages of vaccine development were allowed to overlap. This allowed phase 3 trials to start at the same time as phase 2 trials.

This does not mean that the vaccines are less safe:

- They were tested on a wide target population.
- The European Medicines Agency (EMA):
 - used a special task force of experts
 - prioritized the procedures for assessing the corona vaccines, to allow for rapid evaluation and reliable scientific advice

Protection against the more contagious variants

Viruses mutate

That means that the genetic material in the virus changes. The speed at which this happens varies from virus to virus.

Mutations do not always affect how well the vaccine against the virus works.

Initial lab data about the Pfizer vaccine show that the antibodies you make from the vaccine can also neutralize the British covid variant.

Some vaccines will protect you for years after being vaccinated

Think of the vaccines against measles or rubella. Viruses like the ones that cause the flu mutate regularly. Developers must therefore update the composition of the vaccine every year to ensure the vaccine continues to work.

Scientists monitor whether:

- the coronavirus mutates over time
- vaccines continue to protect people from infections with new variants

Kosher and Halal

The corona vaccines available do not contain gelatine

Gelatine is a protein that comes from pigs. Jews and Muslims are not allowed to eat pork.

Both faiths allow vaccines even if they do contain gelatine:

- For Jews: because you do not ingest the vaccine by mouth.
- For Muslims: because the gelatine is processed and can be considered pure.

Choosing between vaccines

You cannot choose which vaccine you will get

Your name is linked to a code. This code is linked to a vaccine type that is right for you.

Most vaccines consist of 2 doses

Most vaccines require 2 doses, with 3 to 5 week intervals. Are you getting the AstraZeneca vaccine? Then you will get the second dose 8 to 12 weeks later. The Janssen vaccine consists of 1 dose.

Your 2nd vaccination is performed with the same vaccine as the first dose

The vaccination centres have enough vaccines of the correct type to give each person a 2nd dose of the same type of vaccine. All vaccines are registered by name and lot number in [Vaccinnet](#). That way you will get the correct 2nd dose.

Nausea, fever, headache, muscle ache

Shortly after your vaccination, you might get a fever, muscle ache or headache. Or you might feel nauseous. This is a normal reaction of your body to an outside influence. These side effects last a few days at most. If they last any longer, contact your family doctor.

Immediately after your vaccination, you will be shown to a resting area, where you will have to stay for 15 minutes. In the rare event of a serious reaction shortly after your vaccination, the medical staff will be able to help you immediately.

Who can(not) get vaccinated

Pregnant women or women who want to become pregnant can get vaccinated. Those who are sick are better off delaying their vaccination unless you are seriously or long-term ill. High-risk patients are given priority.

You are pregnant or want to become pregnant soon

Pregnant women should get vaccinated

The Superior Health Council strongly recommends that pregnant women get vaccinated, at any time during the pregnancy. After all, pregnant women who become infected with COVID-19 running a greater risk of becoming seriously ill and delivering too early, which poses health risks to the baby. These women can get vaccinated as a priority with an mRNA vaccine starting May 4.

If you want to get pregnant, you are also strongly recommended to get vaccinated.

You are breastfeeding

You are allowed to get vaccinated against corona

You should not stop breastfeeding.

You are sick

If you are sick, it is best not to get vaccinated

Delay your vaccination until 2 weeks after you get better.

If you have a serious or long-term illness, it is better to get vaccinated

Vaccination protects you from serious complications of the virus.

When in doubt

Get advice from your doctor.

You are infected with the coronavirus

If you are sick, it is best not to get vaccinated

Even if you have no complaints. Delay your vaccination until 2 weeks after your positive corona test.

You have a chronic illness

If you have a chronic illness, it is better to get vaccinated

Because, if you get infected with the coronavirus, you will often get worse symptoms. The vaccines have also been tested on people with chronic illnesses.

You have (had) cancer

If you have had cancer, you can get vaccinated

If you are undergoing treatment, you can also get vaccinated.

Do discuss with your oncologist or treating physician what time is most convenient during your treatment. This is to maximize the efficacy of the vaccine.

You are a high-risk patient

As a high-risk patient, you will get priority for the corona vaccine

Because, if you get infected with the coronavirus, you will often get worse symptoms. High-risk patients will get an invitation from the Flemish government to go to a vaccination centre.

If you have any of the following (underlying) conditions, you are considered a high-risk patient:

- In the 45 to 64 years age bracket, these are patients with:
 - chronic respiratory disease
 - chronic cardiovascular disease
 - obesity
 - diabetes
 - chronic nervous disorders
 - dementia
 - cancer (with tumours)

- hypertension
- In the 18 to 64 years of age bracket, high-risk patients are patients with:
 - chronic kidney disease
 - chronic liver disease
 - haematological cancer (e.g., leukaemia)
 - Down syndrome
 - transplant patients (including those on a waiting list)
 - weakened immune system
 - HIV
 - rare condition

The health insurance companies have the necessary information on people with these conditions. This information is supplemented by data from general practitioners. In this way, a list is compiled.

No distinction is made between the different conditions. All conditions are considered equally important. Invitations are done by age, from old to young.

You have an allergy

Have you ever had an immediate or severe allergic reaction after a previous vaccine or needed urgent medical care after taking medication? If so, be sure to discuss this with your doctor.

Your physician will assess your allergies and refer you for evaluation by an allergy specialist or for vaccination in the hospital if necessary.

An allergy to other substances is not a problem:

- The vaccines do not contain preservatives.
- The cap of the vaccine vial is not made of latex.

You should delay your vaccination if you:

Have symptoms of illness, with or without a fever (>38 degrees Celsius)

You can get vaccinated after you are cured.

Are infected with corona or have tested positive for corona

Vertaling uit het Nederlands naar het *Engels* van *FAQ stad Antwerpen*

You can get vaccinated 14 days after you are cured or, in case of asymptomatic infections, 14 days after a positive PCR test.

Are in quarantine

Postpone your vaccination until after the quarantine period.