

Vaccine against coronavirus

– Comirnaty (BioNTech and Pfizer)

The novel coronavirus causes respiratory tract infection. Many people experience either mild or no symptoms, but some may become seriously ill. The elderly, and those who already have certain other diseases from before are at greatest risk of a serious disease course or death. The goal of the coronavirus vaccine is to protect life and health.

Who should have the coronavirus vaccine?

- People aged 65 years and older.
- People aged 18-64 years who have one or more diseases that are known to give an increased risk of serious disease course and death if they are infected by coronavirus (risk groups).
- Healthcare professionals in close contact with patients during treatment or care.

The vaccine is free and is voluntary. It will be offered to people staying in Norway. Initially, there will not be enough vaccine doses for everyone. People who live in nursing homes and the eldest will be offered the vaccine first. Younger people in risk groups will then be offered the vaccine.

How do I get the vaccine?

Check the website of your municipality for information about who is being offered the vaccine, how vaccination is being organised and when it will take place.

How is this vaccine given?

The vaccine is injected into the upper arm. You will receive two doses of vaccine at least 21 days apart. It is important that you take the second dose at the scheduled time. Before you receive the vaccine, you will be asked if you are feeling well and if you have had any reactions to other vaccines you have had. Remember to say if you have any allergies, use medicines or have other health problems. It is common to delay vaccination with acute illness and a fever above 38 °C. After you have had the vaccine, you will be asked to wait for 20 minutes.

How does this vaccine work?

The vaccine contains the recipe (messenger RNA) for the spikes on the coronavirus. The body makes harmless copies of these spikes that the immune system can practise on. In this way, the immune system learns to recognise the coronavirus spikes and can defend the body if it becomes infected with the virus. The messenger RNA is quickly broken down by the body and has no effect on genetic material.

The vaccine does not contain live virus and does not cause COVID-19 disease. The coronavirus vaccine acts to prevent disease. It cannot cure an ongoing illness.

This method of making vaccines has not been used for infectious diseases in humans before, but the technology is known and is used in cancer treatment.

How well does this vaccine work?

This vaccine protects against disease caused by the novel coronavirus. A week after the second dose in the vaccine studies, around 95 % of those vaccinated had protection. For the eldest, there are few data. We do not yet know how long the protection lasts. If the protection diminishes over time, booster doses may be necessary. We do not yet know how well the vaccine prevents transmission of the virus. Therefore, it is important to continue to follow the current infection control advice.

Side effects

From the studies that have been performed, we know about the common and less common side effects among people who have been vaccinated. We cannot rule out rare side effects or side effects that first appear a long time after vaccination. Most of the side effects appeared in the first days after vaccination and disappeared within a few days:

- Most of the people vaccinated reported pain at the site of injection.
- Other common side effects include fatigue, headache, muscle pains, chills, joint pains and fever. These side effects are more common after dose 2.
- The side effects are less common among the elderly than younger adults.

In most cases, the side effects were mild or moderate. Fewer than 5 % reported more bothersome side effects that were harmless but that impacted their daily life for the few days they lasted. This was more common after dose 2 and among younger people.

What do I do if I get side effects?

If you experience unexpected, severe or prolonged symptoms that you think may be due to the vaccine, contact your doctor or another healthcare worker for assessment and advice. Healthcare workers have a duty to report any serious or unexpected reactions that they suspect are due to a vaccine. You can also send in a notification yourself via helsenorge.no.

Conditional approval

This coronavirus vaccine has been tested in large studies where several thousand people received the vaccine. The studies were carried out in the same way as for other vaccines, but the observation time is shorter. The medicine regulatory authorities have given the vaccine a conditional approval. This means that there are enough data to assess that the benefit of the vaccine far outweighs the risk, but that the vaccine producer must continue the studies and continuously provide data to the medicine regulatory authorities when they become available.

Which vaccine have I received?

When you have been given a coronavirus vaccine, it will be registered in the Norwegian Immunisation Registry, SYSVAK. You can access your information at helsenorge.no.

Do you want to know more?

Please ask your doctor or other healthcare worker or visit the Norwegian Institute of Health's website at fhi.no/cvp.