



# COVID-19 VACCINE FAQs

LAST UPDATED: 17 May 2021

**New questions in red**

## **Early access to the vaccine for Fire and Emergency personnel**

### **Who is included in the first stage of the vaccine roll out?**

The first stage of the Government's COVID-19 vaccine roll out (known as Group 1) has been focused on all border and MIQ workers covered by the current Required Testing Order (2020) and those they live with – 'household contacts'.

This applies to all workers currently undergoing mandatory COVID-19 testing as part of their work.

These workers are considered to be the people most at risk of exposure to COVID-19 on a daily basis so we need to protect them and those they live with as a priority.

The next group in the Government's vaccine roll out plan (Group 2) includes around 480,000 frontline workers and people who live in high-risk settings, with a particular emphasis on healthcare workers who are more likely to be undertaking work or caring for those considered to be most vulnerable to COVID-19.

### **Will Fire and Emergency personnel be included in the next phase (Group 2) of the Government's vaccine roll out?**

MoH have confirmed that our frontline personnel who are first and co-responders will be vaccinated as part of Group 2, as they undertake work similar to those of frontline ambulance services and healthcare workers.

MoH's planning for this rollout to this group is well underway with MedPro Healthcare being selected as the primary vaccination provider for Fire and Emergency personnel. Details of vaccination hubs, dates and times will be released in the next few weeks.

The number of vaccinations that will be allocated to our people as part of Group 2 is approximately 10,500.

### **Will the vaccine also be made available to the household contacts of Fire and Emergency personnel as part of the early roll-out?**

No, MoH has indicated that early access to the vaccine will only be available for Fire and Emergency personnel who undertake first and co-responder duties, not their household contacts.

### **Do I have to wait for the Fire and Emergency vaccine roll out if I am eligible through an earlier opportunity?**

If you are eligible to get vaccinated earlier than you would through your role at Fire and Emergency, then we strongly encourage you to do so.



### **Why are some Areas and Districts receiving earlier access to the vaccine than others?**

During the vaccination process, there can sometimes be surplus vaccines that become available. This is for a variety of reasons such as people missing appointments, or a larger quantity of vaccines made available than what was originally required.

To ensure these are not wasted, DHB and non-DHB providers may contact us, along with other agencies, to advise there is a surplus vaccine at a site and to invite our people to be vaccinated. This may result in some Areas and Districts getting access to the vaccine earlier than expected.

National Commander Kerry Gregory issued a National Notice outlining guidelines leaders should use if they are approached about surplus vaccines. This can be read on the [Portal](#).

## **Getting the vaccine**

### **If I am not a First or Co-responder, which group do I belong to in the vaccine roll-out?**

Check out the Government's vaccine tool to find out if you're eligible for an early vaccine - <https://covid19.govt.nz/health-and-wellbeing/covid-19-vaccines/getting-a-covid-19-vaccine/find-out-when-you-can-get-a-vaccine/>

### **Who will administer the vaccine?**

MedPro Healthcare has been contracted by MoH to be the primary vaccination provider to Fire and Emergency Group 2 personnel. Some brigades, in more remote locations, will have the choice of having vaccines administered by their local District Health Board.

### **If I am part of Group 2, where do I go to get my vaccination?**

Information will be sent out shortly on the vaccination hubs for Group 2 Fire and Emergency personnel. Vaccination sites will predominately be fire stations within Areas and Districts across the country. We have been working with MedPro Healthcare, Area and District management and union and association representatives to select vaccination sites across the regions.

### **Why are some stations being used as vaccination sites 'hubs' but not others?**

MedPro Healthcare will be using a 'hub' model to vaccinate Fire and Emergency Group 2 personnel. This is due to the distributed nature of our stations and the logistics and vaccinator requirements to setup vaccination sites at all stations across the country. Vaccination sites or hubs will be established in Areas and Districts across the country. People from stations and brigades that are not a hub will need to travel a short distance to receive their vaccination.

### **What if my station is a considerable distance from a vaccination hub?**

MedPro Healthcare is working with the Ministry of Health and District Health Boards to vaccinate Group 2 Fire and Emergency personnel who are in brigades some distance from vaccination hubs. In the near future, District Health Boards will contact these brigades with information on how to get vaccinated. You will still have the option to book a vaccination at one of the MedPro hubs if you wish to travel to a vaccination site.



### **When will I receive my vaccination as part of Group 2?**

A national schedule of vaccination hubs - locations, dates, and times - will be provided by MedPro Healthcare shortly. We acknowledge some of our people in Group 2 have already accessed vaccinations through surplus or bespoke arrangements with DHB's. If you have already received your COVID vaccine, we encourage you to let your Area Manager or Principal Rural Fire Officer know so we can accurately assist MedPro with their roll out to the rest of our people in Group 2.

### **How do I book an appointment with MedPro to be vaccinated?**

MedPro have their own online booking system to coordinate appointment. This will go live once the national schedule has been confirmed by MedPro. We will provide you with a link to access the booking system for your area. Please select a vaccination site and time that is most convenient for you. Should you require it, your Officer in Charge or Manager, will enable you to access the booking system at Station. If you cannot access the MedPro online booking system, please call 0272 935 766 between the hours of 8am and 5pm.

**Note:** You will have to book both your first dose and second dose (21 days apart) separately within the booking system. We'll be sending out additional guides and instructions on how to book an appointment to all stations soon.

### **What should I expect when I go to my vaccine appointment?**

The actual COVID-19 vaccination process will take approximately 5 mins followed by 20 mins of monitoring time in case there are any serious adverse reactions, which are rare. There are mild common side effects that are a natural result of your body developing an immunity to COVID-19 from the vaccination. Reports from the wider roll out suggest that more people experience common side effects after receiving the second dose of the vaccine. The most common side effects include soreness at the injection site, redness and swelling, headache and fatigue. Please consider how this may affect your rostered duty or capability to respond as a member of your brigade.

### **Do I need to bring my NHI number to get a vaccination appointment?**

If you have your NHI number then bring it along to your appointment however it's fine if you don't as vaccination sites will have the ability to search for your NHI number if you don't have it on you.

### **What if I have already received the vaccine through another means (e.g. through my primary employment or as part of another priority group)?**

It is important that you do not receive another course of vaccine. If you are contacted by the vaccinator provider, please let them know if you have already received your vaccination as part of another group.

### **What is the best time to get a vaccination?**



The best time to book and receive your first dose and second dose is dependent on your work and personal situation and is different for everyone. Where possible, being vaccinated whilst off duty will likely mitigate any operational or capability risks that might be caused by an unexpected adverse reaction to either dose.

If you receive a vaccination on duty, you will need to consider, and managers will need to have a plan for:

- How it may affect the duty roster if someone has an adverse reaction whilst at work
- Health and Safety implications for the individual and the rest of the crew
- Appliance movements and delays to response whilst individuals receive a dose
- Maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of on-duty staff receiving their dose

#### **Will my time and travel to get the vaccine be reimbursed?**

It is a personal choice whether or not to get vaccinated. Fire and Emergency will not be reimbursing personnel for time, travel, or dependent expenses to get vaccinated. This decision is consistent with the wider emergency services sector where vaccination has not been mandatory. Additionally, any reimbursement could be seen as a bias towards those who choose to be vaccinated.

#### **Does my whole workplace need to have the vaccine for it to be effective?**

No, the vaccine is to protect yourself. Our existing procedures, policies and protocols will continue to protect our people and communities from individuals spreading COVID-19.

However, if you are eligible to receive the vaccine, we strongly encourage you to do so as it is an added protection against the risk you encounter as part of your role as an essential worker.

#### **Do I have to be vaccinated?**

Receiving the vaccine is a personal choice, aimed at providing an individual layer of protection. We also recognise that some people may not be able to receive the vaccination. The existing Fire and Emergency procedures, policies and protocols are still our best protection against COVID-19 and the vaccination is another layer on top. We have worked through a process with the Unions and Associations, in line with the Public Service Commission guidance to determine there are no roles domestically within Fire and Emergency that require a vaccination. There may be some international deployment roles that require vaccination and the individuals this applies to will be contacted and notified.

#### **I am on Leave/Long Term Illness/Injury, when will I receive my vaccination?**

This detail will have to be discussed with your Manager. At this stage, the Government's focus is on Groups 1 and 2, which will likely include our first and co-responders. If you fall into this category and it is practical and feasible to incorporate you into the Group 2 vaccinations, we will do our best to make the vaccine available to you.

Please note that if you are on long term sick leave, depending on the nature of your illness you may be eligible to get early access to the vaccine as part of Group 3 in the Government's roll out



programme. Check out the Government's vaccine tool to find out if you're eligible for an early vaccine - <https://covid19.govt.nz/health-and-wellbeing/covid-19-vaccines/getting-a-covid-19-vaccine/find-out-when-you-can-get-a-vaccine/>

### **How long does it take to get a vaccine dose?**

Getting a single dose of the vaccine will take about 30 minutes (not including waiting time before your appointment). The vaccine appointment will take about 10 minutes, but you will then be required to wait onsite for a further 20 minutes to be monitored for any immediate allergic or adverse reactions, similar to the process of getting other vaccines.

Remember that the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is a double dose vaccine, which means you will need to get a second dose 21 days after your first to ensure the vaccine is effective.

### **What happens if I miss my initial vaccine appointment as part of Group 2?**

It's likely that there will be only one or two opportunities to be vaccinated as part of the roll out programme if you are eligible under Group 2. However, there will be other opportunities to get the vaccine with the wider New Zealand public as part of Group 4 or if you are in another eligible Group (over 65, live in the Counties-Manukau area or have a pre-existing medical condition). If you've missed your appointment, please let your manager know.

### **What happens if I experience side effects from the vaccine?**

Like all medicines, the vaccine may cause side effects in some people. These are common, are usually mild and don't last long. They won't stop you from having the second dose or going about your daily life.

Serious reactions are very rare.

Some common side effects include:

- Pain at the injection site
- A headache
- Feeling tired or fatigued or generally unwell
- Muscle aches
- Chills
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Nausea

If you are concerned about any side effects from your vaccine, please call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 in the first instance.



If side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine prevent you from performing your role, you should contact your manager and inform them. Any absences created from this should be recorded as sick leave. For more information go to <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-getting-vaccine/covid-19-after-your-vaccination#side-effects>

**Will I have to pay to get the vaccine?**

No. The vaccine is free for everyone in New Zealand. Please be aware of scams that invite you to pay for early access or vaccine services.

## Your information

**What vaccine information will Fire and Emergency collect and share?**

Generally, Fire and Emergency will collect numbers of our people who get the vaccine, rather than data on individuals, for the purposes of reporting.

However, there are some roles where we would require details on vaccination status for individuals that perform high risk activities such as those who sign up to participate in international deployments.

We will only use personal information to provide the vaccine provider with the information necessary to undertake the vaccination. If there is a requirement for Fire and Emergency to pass your information to the vaccination provider as part of the roll-out, we will let you know how it will be used and give you the opportunity to opt out.

**Will FENZ be collecting information about my vaccine status?**

No, there is no domestic operational or workplace requirement for our staff to receive a vaccination, therefore Fire and Emergency will not be recording your vaccination status.

To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of our people is maintained we recommend that leaders have a system in place to contact personnel to notify about surplus vaccine opportunities that takes their privacy and confidentiality into account.

**How will the Government record if I have been vaccinated?**

MoH collects information for anyone getting the vaccine like they currently do for the yearly flu vaccine. Relevant personal details and National Health Index Number (NHI Number) will help MoH identify you.

There are some roles where they would require details on vaccination status for individuals that perform high risk activities such as those who sign up to participate in international deployments.



## Getting other vaccines with the COVID-19 vaccine

### Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I've already had the flu vaccine?

If you've received the flu vaccine, you must wait 14 days before your first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and then have your second dose 21 days later.

If you get your COVID-19 vaccination before your flu vaccination, you will need to wait 14 days after your second dose of your COVID-19 vaccination before you can get your flu vaccination.

Please note, these timeframes relate to all vaccines, not just with the flu vaccine. The waiting times between different vaccines is to allow any adverse side effects from either vaccine to be monitored.

Remember that you will also be screened by health professionals before any vaccine you receive including the COVID-19 and flu vaccines.

## About the COVID-19 vaccine

### Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Getting vaccinated is the best thing we can do to keep ourselves, our whānau, and our wider community safe from COVID-19. By having the vaccine you'll be playing your part to protect Aotearoa. The free COVID-19 vaccine will help protect the team of five million and safeguard our country. It will save lives.

### Is the vaccine safe and effective?

Medsafe, New Zealand's medicines safety authority, has approved the COVID-19 Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for use in New Zealand. Medsafe must ensure new medicines – including vaccines – meet strict standards of safety, quality, and effectiveness. The vaccine was approved following a thorough approval process that includes the same types of safety checks and review of clinical information that is applicable to all other licensed medicines. Many millions of people have already received the Pfizer vaccine worldwide.

The Ministry of Health's COVID-19 vaccines page has further information about the vaccine, vaccine safety and potential side-effects. The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has been shown to be 95% effective against symptomatic COVID-19, a protection that begins seven days after receiving the second dose.

### Why are some groups getting earlier doses than others?

The Ministry of Health are rolling the vaccination out in stages to various groups. However, the rollout to different groups is not linear, so some groups may begin before others have finished. As we begin our vaccination of First and Co-responders who are within Group 2 we may begin to see Group 3 start their vaccinations.



### **Can I delay receiving my second dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine?**

It is recommended to have the second dose at least 21 days after the first dose. A short delay after the 21 days is not considered to be a problem, but in order to get the full protection from the vaccine, you will need to get both the first and second dose.

### **Once vaccinated, will I still need to be tested if I have been exposed to a risk of transmission?**

Yes. The data is clear that the vaccines protect individuals from the effects of the virus, however it is still too early for researchers to determine whether a vaccinated person could still transmit the virus to someone else. While this remains unclear, we need to assume there is still a risk of transmission.

Further information can be found on the MoH website - <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines>

### **Is the vaccine effective against new strains of the virus?**

MoH is evaluating preliminary data from other countries about the impact new strains may have on vaccine effectiveness. Some companies have indicated they may make changes to the vaccine to ensure they work properly – this is similar to the regular changes made to the influenza vaccine.

Further information can be found on the MoH website - <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines>

### **Why does there need to be a 21-day gap between the first and second dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine?**

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine requires two shots, spaced 21 days apart in order to be effective.

### **Will booster doses of a COVID-19 vaccine be needed?**

More data is needed to establish if a third dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is required.

### **How do the vaccines work?**

Vaccines work by teaching the body's immune system to respond quickly to infection without being exposed to the infection itself. Traditionally, most vaccines work by introducing modified versions, or bits of the virus, to the immune system, prompting the body's immune system to respond by making protective antibodies so that when you come across the real infection your body is prepared to fight it off.

Some of the COVID-19 vaccines, such as the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, use a different approach. These are known as 'messenger RNA' vaccines. These vaccines don't use virus cells at all – instead they contain a piece of RNA code that essentially teaches your body to recognise the virus, so it can respond straight away if you get infected. Each vaccine is slightly different and has its own characteristics. Specific information about each vaccine will be made available as Medsafe completes its approval processes.





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