

FAQs about COVID-19 Vaccine March 22, 2021

A- Vaccines general information

1- Is the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine safe and effective?

The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective. More than 20 million doses of AstraZeneca have been used so far. After reviewing reports and data of clinical trials from countries that have used the vaccine so far, the World Health Organization issued a recommendation on March 19, 2021, to "continue using the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine after it has demonstrated a high ability to prevent infection and reduce deaths around the world".

2- Is there a link between the blood clotting cases and the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine?

Scientific data reviewed by the World Health Organization indicates that there is no link between the blood clotting cases and the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine. The number of reported cases were lower than expected. Accordingly, the World Health Organization recommends to continue using the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

3- What is the difference between the different COVID-19 vaccines?

All COVID-19 vaccines are effective and contribute to controlling the pandemic by reducing the number of deaths and number of people who need intensive care. Therefore, it is recommended to use any Covid-19 vaccine that has received an Emergency Use Authorization EUA.

4- Are the COVID-19 vaccines effective against mutations and new variants of COVID-19?

Most scientists believe that the vaccines that are currently in development and a couple that have been approved should provide protection against this variant and other variant and so a couple of changes or mutations in the virus should not make these vaccines ineffective. Right now, there are studies going on in labs around the world to actually confirm that.

5- Since now we are witnessing more COVID-19 deaths between infants and children, can we give the vaccine to them? At least the non-mRNA ones?

The approved vaccines were not recommended for individuals below 16-18 years of age, as these groups were not part of the clinical trials. The Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine is recommended in individuals 16 years of age and older, AstraZeneca vaccine is not recommended for persons younger than 18 years of age pending the results of further studies, same for Sputnik V vaccine.

6- Should we start double masking to protect ourselves against the new variants of COVID-19?

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found close-fitting surgical masks worn underneath cloth masks – known as double masking – can significantly enhance protection against Covid-19.

7- Are Covid-19 vaccines safe?

Covid-19 vaccines have been tested to ensure their safety in the short term, and till date minimal side effects have been reported.

8- What side effects should I expect from taking Covid-19 vaccines?

As with most Intramuscular vaccinations, some side effects are expected, such as redness and pain at the site where the injection is given. In some cases, a slight increase in body temperature during the first 48 hours after vaccination may occur, as well as feeling fatigue, headache, and muscle pain. In very rare cases, Anaphylactic shock was observed.

9- How many doses of Covid-19 vaccine are needed?

Most Covid-19 vaccines that have been tested so far require two doses per recipient.

10- What is the time interval between doses of Covid-19 vaccine?

This period ranges between three to four weeks for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and between four to twelve weeks for AstraZeneca.

11- What happens if a person is unable to take the second dose?

According to recommendations, it is important to adhere to the dates of vaccination to achieve the required level of immunity and get the maximum benefit from the vaccine.

12- Since 2 doses of Covid-19 vaccine are needed, can the second dose be a different Covid-19 vaccine?

No, you must take the same Covid-19 vaccine for both doses.

13- After obtaining the required doses, how much time does the vaccine need to start working and providing us with the required protection?

Two to four weeks after the second dose of vaccination.

14- Can taking the Covid-19 vaccine itself lead to infection with Covid-19?

No, taking the Covid-19 vaccine will not lead to infection with Covid-19.

15- Which Covid-19 vaccines have been approved by the WHO till date?

As of January 2021, Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccines have received emergency use authorization by WHO.

16- Are Covid-19 vaccines effective despite being produced at a record speed compared to other vaccines?

Yes, they have been produced at a record speed given the urgency. All vaccines approved for emergency use to date have demonstrated high levels of safety and efficacy.

17- If a person was previously infected with Covid-19, do I still need to get vaccinated?

There are no contraindications, but it is preferable to wait around six months before receiving the vaccine, as, according to expectations, the person will enjoy “natural immunity” against the virus from three to six months after infection and will be protected from the virus.

18- What if the vaccine has side effects? Who is responsible in this case?

The Lebanese Parliament has approved a law for regulating the use of medical products to combat the Coronavirus pandemic, which includes compensating individuals who suffer from severe injuries resulting from the use of the vaccine through the Ministry of Public Health. The ministry will establish a specialized scientific committee in this regard, to evaluate and determine the damages resulting from the use of the vaccine and financing compensation, if approved, from the general budget reserve and an independent compensation fund, provided that these side effects are reported within a specific period of time after taking the vaccine through the platform or the hotline 1214.

19- Does the Covid-19 vaccine require special handling in terms of transportation and storage at very low temperatures?

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine needs to be stored at very low temperatures of -80 ° C. Currently, there are 12 hospitals in Lebanon that have refrigerators suitable for storing this vaccine. Work is also underway to secure additional refrigerators, with direct support from the WHO.

20- How long does the immunity provided by the Covid-19 vaccine last?

It is still early to answer whether the Covid-19 vaccine will provide long-term protection. More research is needed before giving a definitive answer. But the goal of vaccination is to limit the spread of the Coronavirus epidemic.

21- Will we need to take the Covid-19 vaccine annually, like other vaccines such as the influenza vaccine?

It is still early to know whether or not the COVID-19 vaccines will provide long-term protection. More research is being conducted worldwide to answer this question.

22- Can the influenza vaccine replace the Covid-19 vaccine?

No, they are two different viruses.

23- Can individuals who received the Covid-19 vaccine stop taking public safety measures, such as stop wearing a mask?

Those who received the vaccine must continue to adhere to health safety measures, until a large percentage of the population has been vaccinated, upon which authorities will allow citizens to gradually return to normal life. Until then, individuals who received the vaccine must continue to wear masks and practice social distancing measures and hand hygiene.

24- Can individuals who received the vaccine transmit the virus to others?

Getting vaccinated does not mean that a person will never contract the virus. The vaccine provides protection from moderate to severe symptoms, similarly to other vaccines. In the event of contraction, the person remains able to transmit the virus to others, so it is necessary to adhere to preventive measures continuously until herd immunity is obtained (when more than 80% of the population would have received the vaccine).

25- Do people who contracted and recovered from Covid-19 need to be vaccinated?

Yes, but they can wait up to six months after contracting it.

B- Vaccine purchase, storage, distribution, and quality control in Lebanon

26- How can we make sure that the vaccines we get are in good condition especially that we suffer in Lebanon from power cuts and bad transportation roads?

Vaccine will be transported from the airport to the storage centers using refrigerated vehicles. Continuous temperature monitoring system is in place to ensure there are no temperature fluctuation during excursions. At the storage and vaccination sites, it is a prerequisite for any site to be approved for vaccination to have a continuous power supply and the right cold chain equipment. These sites are assessed before given the approval and they are trained on how to properly store and manage the vaccine.

27- Will there be international organizations such as WHO or UNICEF to provide monitoring and info about the vaccine implementation, as there are lots of talks that it will be politicized.

The World Bank identified an international independent monitoring mechanism to monitor the roll-out of the vaccination plan. An international independent Third-Party Monitoring agency was selected, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent **IFRC**, and will independently monitor the compliance of the vaccination deployment with the National COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Plan, international standards and WB requirements. Findings of this monitoring mechanism will be shared with a Joint Monitoring Committee that the World Bank will chair. Members of this committee will include relevant UN agencies (WHO, UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR and UNRWA). There will be regular reports shared with the public summarizing the findings.

28- Since MoPH approved the use of Russian vaccine, and as we have several types of vaccines now approved, can we choose the type of vaccine we can take?

Beneficiaries can choose the site they want to get their vaccine from through their account on COVAX platform. Then they can receive whatever vaccine is available at the vaccination site.

29- Lebanon signed an agreement with COVAX. What does COVAX mean?

The COVAX program is a mechanism designed to ensure rapid, fair and equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines worldwide. The COVAX program is one of the three pillars of the Access to Covid-19 Tools accelerator, and it was launched in April 2020 by the WHO, the European Commission and France in response to this pandemic. As such, governments, global health organizations, manufacturers, scientists, the private sector, civil society and charitable organizations have been brought together, with the aim of providing innovative and equitable access to Covid-19 diagnosis, treatments and vaccines.

187 countries and economies will benefit from the COVAX facility, and 92 low-income countries and economies have qualified for assistance through advanced market commitments.

30- Why did the Lebanese government choose, in the first phase, the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine?

Because it was the first vaccine that was approved for emergency use. Following the announcement that several vaccines were being tested worldwide, the ministry of public health contacted relevant authorities such as the Russian embassy, the Chinese embassy and international pharmaceutical companies located in Lebanon (Moderna, for example, does not have a scientific office or any representative in Lebanon) and asked to provide it with all the information pertaining to vaccines for evaluation and the possibility of authorizing a vaccine for emergency use.

Based on the data that was submitted to the Ministry of Public Health, and taking into consideration the effectiveness and approval of the vaccine by international authorities, which is the basis for registering and approving any medicine in Lebanon, the Pfizer vaccine was selected - it fulfilled these controls and obtained an emergency use authorization license. It should be noted that the Pfizer vaccine is currently used in the United States of America, Britain and other European countries, and health workers in the front lines are being vaccinated as a first step.

31- Which authorities approved and licensed the Pfizer vaccine against Covid-19? Did the FDA approve it?

Both the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the World Health Organization have authorized this vaccine for emergency use.

In addition to the following bodies: European Medicines Agency (EMA), UK health authorities (MHRA), Canadian health authorities and other countries.

32- What are the components of the Covid-19 vaccine that has been purchased by the Lebanese government?

In the first stage, the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine will be secured, which is the first vaccine that was authorized for emergency use by the WHO and many international health authorities. This vaccine contains a fragment of the virus's genetic material - mRNA. The Ministry of Public Health is working to secure access to other types of Covid-19 vaccines that meet the approved standards, either through the COVAX platform or through the private sector.

33- Which entity will finance Lebanon's vaccination plan?

The Lebanese state will purchase 2 million and 100 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine through a loan from the World Bank.

The first payment for the COVAX platform was settled by the Ministry of Public Health from the vaccine budget. Funds were also transferred from the budget reserve to the budget of the Ministry of Public Health to settle the second payment of the contract signed with the COVAX platform in order to secure 2 million and 730 thousand doses of vaccine.

34- Will there be enough vaccines for everyone?

According to the national Covid-19 vaccination plan, the Lebanese state is working on securing the vaccine for 80% of the population during the year 2021-2022. The vaccine will also be introduced through the private sector to secure greater coverage.

35- Which healthcare facilities will offer vaccination?

In the first phase, vaccination centers will be set up in the main hospitals in Lebanon.

36- Will the vaccine be free of charge for all residents, including all refugees and immigrants?

The vaccines that will be provided through the Ministry of Public Health will be free of charge for the targeted groups, according to priority, for all residents on Lebanese territory.

37- How can we ensure the quality of the vaccine that is distributed free of charge?

Only vaccines that have been authorized and approved by international entities will be purchased, and the storage and distribution process will follow WHO's guidelines. Also, MoH and IFRC carry out periodic inspections.

38- How many people are likely to receive the vaccine?

The vaccine will be given according to priority and fair distribution depending on the age, chronic diseases, and type of occupation. The numbers will gradually increase when other vaccines become available, to reach 80% of the population in 2022, according to the national Covid-19 vaccination plan.

39- Can a person get the vaccine through his doctor?

There is currently no mechanism for obtaining the vaccine through a private doctor. The current mechanism followed is receiving the vaccine at vaccination centers approved by the Ministry of Public Health. Those wishing to vaccinate must register their names on the COVID-19 vaccination platform. This mechanism guarantees obtaining an official vaccination card.

40- How can I get the vaccine?

1- Register on the electronic platform that was launched: <https://covax.moph.gov.lb>

- Through unions / groups or individually
- Obtaining a text message specifying the date, time and place to receive the vaccine

2- Upon arrival at the vaccination center:

- The beneficiary arrives within the specified time period (5-10 minutes for early / late arrival)
- The beneficiary's data is verified, (according to the document that was used when registering on the platform), the beneficiary is then registered and directed to the seat assigned to him in the waiting area.

3- Administration of the vaccine:

- The beneficiary is called to the vaccination clinic
- The beneficiary is vaccinated after making sure that there are no contraindications to vaccination, through a prepared list of questions
- The beneficiary is asked to wait in the monitoring area

4- After receiving the vaccine

- The beneficiary is notified about the expected side effects
- After a 15-30 minutes waiting period, the beneficiary is allowed to leave the vaccination center
- The beneficiary is asked to report any side effects to the center from which he/she received the vaccine or via the vaccination platform or Covid-19 vaccine hotline 1214.

41- Is Covid-19 vaccination optional?

Yes, the vaccine is optional.

42- Will individuals who received the Covid-19 vaccine be exempted from doing the PCR test before travelling?

You should check the recommendations of the country you are traveling to.

43- What is the role of the Lebanese media during this pandemic?

Disseminating information based on valid medical evidence, contributing to raising awareness and highlighting success stories, and providing a platform for public debate on important public health issues.

C- Special cases (pregnancy, breastfeeding, chronic diseases, etc.)

44- Is it safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women to receive the vaccine?

WHO recommends that if a lactating woman is part of priority groups (e.g. health worker), vaccination can be offered. WHO guidance recommends that mothers currently breastfeeding or expressing milk and who are vaccinated **continue breastfeeding after vaccination as breastfeeding protects their infants.**

45- Is the Covid-19 vaccine safe at all stages of pregnancy?

the potential risks of mRNA vaccines to a pregnant woman and fetus are unknown because these vaccines have not been studied in pregnant women. WHO states that pregnant women at high risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (e.g. health workers) or who have comorbidities which add to their risk of severe disease, may be vaccinated in consultation with their health care provider. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM), International Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecology (FIGO) and many others stated that the new mRNA vaccine for Covid-19 can be given to eligible pregnant and lactating women who wish to be vaccinated. Pregnant women can consult with their caregivers about the science and vaccination standards for each country's priorities.

The National taskforce committee of Coronavirus in Pregnancy NTCCP at the Ministry of Health recommends, in agreement with the The National COVID-19 Vaccine Coordinating Committee (NCC), **that a pregnant woman receives the vaccine - if she so chooses - and after consulting with her health care provider.**

46- Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for breastfeeding mothers?

Breastfeeding has many benefits for breastfeeding mothers and babies. From a biological and clinical perspective, vaccines do not appear to affect the quantity, quality or process of breastfeeding.

The National taskforce committee of Coronavirus in Pregnancy NTCCP, in agreement with the National The National COVID-19 Vaccine Coordinating Committee (NCC) , **recommends that breastfeeding mothers get the vaccine if they choose so- and after consulting with their healthcare provider.**

47- Will COVID-19 vaccines affect fertility?

So far, there is no evidence that the vaccine affects fertility.

48- Can I get vaccinated if I am planning to become pregnant?

Yes. Since the Covid-19 virus is a high risk, especially for pregnant women, it is best to get vaccinated before becoming pregnant, depending on the priority of the group you belong to.

49- If I suffer from allergies, is it safe to take the Covid 19 vaccine?

you should not receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine if you had an anaphylactic shock after receiving a previous dose of this vaccine, or you have a severe allergic reaction to any component of this vaccine.

50- If I suffer from chronic non-communicable diseases (such as diabetes, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, etc.) is it safe to take the Covid 19 vaccine?

Vaccination is recommended for people with diseases identified as increasing the risk of severe COVID-19 contraction, including obesity, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and diabetes.

51- Can people with special needs get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, people with special needs can take the vaccine.