



# A guide to the COVID-19 autumn booster

**People aged 50 years and older, residents in care homes for older people, those aged 5 years and over in a clinical risk group and frontline health and social care staff will be offered a booster of coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine this autumn.**

## **Who is being offered an autumn booster?**

COVID-19 is more serious in older people and in people with certain underlying health conditions. This winter it is expected that many respiratory infections, including COVID-19 and flu may be circulating at high levels – this may put increasing pressure on hospitals and other health care services. For these reasons, people aged 50 years and over, those in care homes, and those aged 5 years and over in clinical risk groups are being offered an autumn booster of COVID-19 vaccine. A booster will also be offered to front-line health

and social care staff, those who care for vulnerable individuals and families of individuals with weakened immune systems.

The autumn booster is being offered to those at high risk of the complications of COVID-19 infection, who may have not been boosted for a few months. As the number of COVID-19 infections is likely to increase over the winter, this booster should help to reduce your risk of being admitted to hospital with COVID-19.

The booster may also provide some protection against milder Omicron infection but such protection does not last for long.

## Timing of the autumn booster

Vaccination will be available between September and December, and those at highest risk will be vaccinated first. You should have your autumn booster at least 3 months after your last dose of vaccine.

If you are eligible for a flu vaccine, you may be able to have them at the same time – if not please go ahead anyway, you can catch up with the other vaccine later.

## Which vaccine will you be offered?

You will be given a booster dose of a vaccine made by Pfizer or Moderna. You may be offered an updated combination version of these booster vaccines – the combination vaccines include:

- a half-dose of the original vaccine combined with:
- a half-dose of a vaccine against the Omicron variant.

Both the original and the combination vaccines boost protection very well, although the combination vaccines produce slightly higher levels of antibody against some strains of Omicron.

As we cannot predict which variants of the virus of COVID-19 will be circulating this winter, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) have concluded that both types of vaccine can be used in adults, and that no one should delay vaccination to receive combination vaccines.

So you will be offered the right vaccine for you at the right time.

**Please accept the vaccination that is offered to you as soon as you are able to – it is important to have your booster and build up your protection against severe illness before the winter.**

## Who cannot take up the offer of an autumn booster

There are very few people who should not have this booster. If you have had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine you should discuss this with your doctor.

## Side effects

**Common side effects:** As with your previous doses, the common side effects are the same for all COVID-19 vaccines, including the combination vaccines being used this autumn, and include:

- having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection – this tends to be worst around 1 to 2 days after the vaccine
- feeling tired
- headache
- general aches or mild flu-like symptoms

You can rest and take paracetamol (follow the dose advice in the packaging) to help you feel better.

Although a fever can occur within a day or two of vaccination, if you have any other COVID-19 symptoms or your fever lasts longer, stay at home and you may need to have a test. Symptoms following vaccination normally last less than a week. If your symptoms seem to get worse or if you are concerned, contact your GP or Out of Hours service. You can also report suspected side effects of vaccines and medicines through the Yellow Card scheme.

**Serious side effects:** Cases of inflammation of the heart (called myocarditis or pericarditis) have been reported very rarely after both the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. These cases have been seen mostly in younger men and within several days of vaccination. Most of the people affected have felt better and recovered quickly following rest and simple treatments. You should seek medical advice urgently from your doctor or Emergency Department if, after vaccination, you experience:

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- chest pain
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- shortness of breath
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- feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering or pounding heart
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If you had serious side effects after any previous dose you may be advised to avoid or delay further vaccination. You should discuss this with your doctor or specialist. Please see back page of the leaflet to see how to report side effects.

## Can you still catch COVID-19 after having the vaccine?

The COVID-19 booster will reduce the chance of you becoming severely unwell from COVID-19 this winter. It may take a few days for your body to build up some extra protection from the booster. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective – some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but any infection should be less severe.

## If you have not had all your vaccinations

If you have not yet had either of your first 2 doses of the vaccine (or a third dose for those with a weakened immune system) you should have them as soon as possible. If you are eligible for the autumn booster but think you have missed a previous booster you should still go ahead – you will not need another dose.

## If you have a COVID-19 positive result, when can you have your autumn booster?

If you are unwell, wait until you have recovered to have your vaccine. If you have had confirmed COVID-19 you should ideally wait 4 weeks before having your autumn booster. You should not attend for vaccination if you are self-isolating or waiting for a COVID-19 test.

## Further information

You can read the following COVID-19 information leaflets on the PHA website [www.pha.site/covid19infomaterials](http://www.pha.site/covid19infomaterials)

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**COVID-19 What to expect after vaccination**

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**COVID-19 A guide to the programme**

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**Pregnant? Have your COVID-19 vaccinations**

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**COVID-19 vaccinations – a guide for people with a weakened immune system**

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Read the **product information leaflets for UK recipients of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines** for more details on your vaccine, including possible side effects.

For a very small number of people another vaccine product may be advised by your doctor.

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For more information on how to get your autumn booster, visit [nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine](http://nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine)

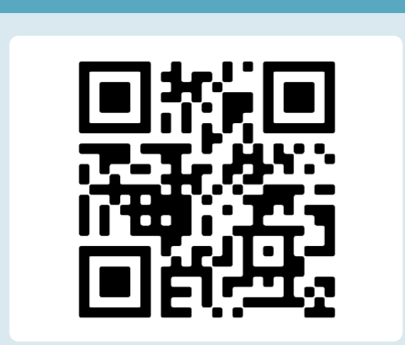
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You can report suspected side effects on the Yellow Card website or by calling 0800 731 6789 (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday) or by downloading the Yellow Card app

[www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard)



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