COVID-19 VACCINATION

General information on the COVID-19 vaccination with an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna)

Is the vaccination safe and effective?
Since every vaccine in Switzerland must be authorised and recommended, it has to meet stringent safety, efficacy and quality requirements. Swissmedic, the Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products, has carefully assessed and authorised the mRNA vaccines against COVID-19. They are safe and they work. Several tens of thousands of people have received the vaccines in clinical trials. They are also safe and effective for the elderly and those with chronic illnesses.

Since their approval, several million people have received these vaccines. Experts will continue to monitor the safety and efficacy of the vaccines. The benefits of a vaccine must significantly outweigh the risks. Only then will the vaccine be recommended in Switzerland.

In general: The risk of serious side effects after the vaccination is much lower than the danger of falling seriously ill after being infected with the coronavirus.

Where and when can I be vaccinated?
The federal government has drawn up a vaccination strategy and vaccination recommendations. The cantons are responsible for vaccination. Find out from your cantonal website or infoline (www.foph-coronavirus.ch/cantons) who can currently be vaccinated with an mRNA vaccine and where, or ask your doctor or pharmacist.

Who should not be vaccinated?
We do not recommend the COVID-19 vaccination for the following:
- People with a severe, confirmed allergy to an ingredient of the vaccines, particularly polyethylene glycol (PEG).
- Children and adolescents under the age of 16. So far not enough data is available on vaccination in this age group.

There is still not very much data on the vaccination in pregnancy. For the time being we still do not recommend COVID-19 vaccination for pregnant women across the board. However, we do recommend vaccination with an mRNA vaccine for those with certain forms of chronic illnesses1 or those at a greater risk of infection (such as healthcare personnel). All other pregnant women also have the option of having the vaccination. Please talk to your doctor if you’re pregnant.

Please note: If you have a high temperature or are feeling ill or unwell, postpone your vaccination.
If you are waiting for your COVID-19 test result, are in isolation or in quarantine, do not have the vaccination now. Go for the vaccination as soon as you can.

What happens during the vaccination?
You receive an injection in the upper arm.

How many injections do I have to have?
Usually two injections are needed. You can receive the second injection about four weeks after the first.
Important: You must receive both injections in order to obtain the best possible protection.
If you have already had a coronavirus infection (confirmed with a PCR test, rapid antigen test or antibody test), you usually only need one vaccination with an mRNA vaccine.

How does the vaccination protect me?
Your body gradually builds up protection against COVID-19. This takes up to around one or two weeks after the second injection. The vaccination strengthens your body’s defences. It helps your body fight the virus. The risk that you will get COVID-19 is then very small. According to the current science, the mRNA vaccines also protect against the virus variants identified so far.
Important: Complete protection is not possible. Some people can still get COVID-19 despite being vaccinated. But the vaccination does increase your chances of avoiding serious illness. You will find further details on how the vaccination works here: www.foph-coronavirus.ch/mrna

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1 You will find a detailed list of conditions here: Categories of persons at especially high risk (PDF, 205 kB)
How long does the vaccination protect me?
Experts are currently investigating how long the vaccination provides protection. According to the latest research, protection lasts at least six months. There are presently no signs that protection declines after that. However, it may be that another vaccination is needed later on.

Can I get COVID-19 because of the vaccination?
No. You do not get COVID-19 as a result of the vaccination. The vaccines do not contain any coronaviruses.

Should I get vaccinated if I’ve already been infected with the coronavirus?
The vaccination also makes sense if you have already had a coronavirus infection. In the weeks following the infection you are protected from renewed infection. From six months after you have been infected, you should have the vaccination as soon as possible. After a coronavirus infection (confirmed with a PCR test, rapid antigen test or antibody test), one dose of vaccine is sufficient. You do not have to have a second dose. There are exceptions for especially vulnerable people; ask your doctor.

Are there any side effects?
Side effects can occur with any vaccination. They are usually mild and pass quickly. Serious side effects occur very rarely. In individual cases, for example, people have experienced a serious allergic reaction directly after the COVID-19 vaccination with an mRNA vaccine. Besides that there have so far been no noticeable problems with serious side effects. Such side effects could be expected to emerge within a few months of the vaccination. Experts are keeping a close eye on potential indications.

What side effects are possible?
- The place on your arm where you received the injection can become inflamed, painful or swollen.
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Muscle and joint pains
- General symptoms such as shivering,
- feeling feverish or a mild fever

These side effects are common after a vaccination. Since they indicate that the body is building up protection against the disease, they are a good sign when they are mild.

An allergic reaction is typically associated with severe swelling, redness, itching or shortness of breath immediately after the injection. You should contact your doctor immediately if you experience such symptoms.

How long can side effects last?
The side effects usually disappear within a few days. If you are still experiencing side effects after a week, or if they get worse or cause you concern, contact your doctor.

I am vaccinated. Can I infect other people with the coronavirus?
The vaccine protects you against COVID-19. Current data on the mRNA vaccines shows that the transmission of the coronavirus to other people is low after full vaccination. However, the vaccination does not provide 100% protection. Please remember: Continue to follow the hygiene and social distancing rules, and wear a mask where this is required. But if you are fully vaccinated, you do not have to social distance at private gatherings with other fully vaccinated people. You can also be exempted from quarantine after close contact with someone who has tested positive. Added to this you are exempt from many sanitary measures at the border.

Who pays for the vaccination?
Your vaccination is free of charge for you. Your health insurer pays for part of the vaccination. The federal government and the cantons will pay the remainder.

Is the vaccination voluntary?
Yes. Vaccinations are voluntary in Switzerland. There are no plans for compulsory vaccination.

Where can I find further information?
You will find further information on COVID-19 vaccination on the FOPH website (www.foph-coronavirus.ch/vaccination) or ask your doctor or pharmacist.