



UK Forum on
Haemoglobin
Disorders



COVID-19 Vaccination in patients with Haemoglobinopathies and Rare Inherited Anaemias

17th December 2020

We welcome the news that there is now a vaccine available to help protect against COVID-19 infection.

On December 2nd 2020 the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) agreed that the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is **safe** and effective with very few contraindications.

We are hoping that in the New Year we will have an update about the other vaccines being developed and also have more information about when people with haemoglobin disorders will be invited for the vaccine.

We would encourage everyone to read the patient information below and ask your haematology team any questions you may have.

We think it is vital that people with haemoglobin disorders get the vaccine as soon as it is offered in order to keep them safe and well.

How safe is the COVID-19 vaccine?

We know many people have been concerned about how quickly the vaccine has been developed. However, due to the global emergency, developing a coronavirus vaccine has been prioritised by scientists, drug companies and governments, and a huge amount of collaboration has helped this to happen as fast as possible. Any coronavirus vaccine that is approved must go through all the clinical trials and safety checks all other licensed medicines go through.

The first vaccine currently approved for use in the UK was developed by Pfizer/BioNTech and has met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness set out by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

Other vaccines are being developed. However, they will only be available on the NHS once they have been thoroughly tested to make sure they are safe and effective following clinical trials and safety checks that meets international standards.

So far, thousands of people have been given a COVID-19 vaccine and no serious complications have been reported.



Who can get the COVID-19 vaccine?

The NHS is currently offering the COVID-19 vaccine to people most at risk from coronavirus.

The vaccine is being offered in some hospitals to the highest risk groups. It will be offered more widely and in other locations as soon as possible.

The highest risk groups are:

- 1: residents in a care home for older adults; staff working in care homes for older adults
- 2: all those 80 years of age and over; frontline health and social care workers
- 3: all those 75 years of age and over
- 4: all those 70 years of age and over, Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (not including pregnant women and those under 16 years of age)
- 5: all those 65 years of age and over
- 6: adults aged 16-65 years who are in a risk group
- 7: all those 60 years of age and over
- 8: all those 55 years and over
- 9: all those 50 years and over

More information is available here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-2-december-2020>

When will people with haemoglobin disorders receive the vaccine?

It is likely to take several months for all high-risk groups to be vaccinated.

Some people will receive the vaccine before others. This is because some people are more at risk of developing severe complications from COVID-19 than others.

Clinically extremely vulnerable patients

People who were previously asked to shield due to being deemed “clinically extremely vulnerable” will be offered the vaccine in **Group 4**.

This includes all adults with sickle cell disease, small numbers of children with very severe complications of sickle cell disease and some patients with thalassaemia and inherited rare anaemias who have severe iron overload.



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Underlying health conditions.

Patients aged 16-65 years with underlying health conditions will be offered vaccination in **Group 6**.

This group includes people who receive the flu jab every year because they have problems with their spleen or have had their spleen removed. This group will include thalassaemia and rare inherited anaemia patients who have had their spleen removed.

The NHS will let you know when it's your turn to have the vaccine. It's important not to contact the NHS for a vaccination before then.

How is the COVID-19 vaccine is given?

The COVID-19 vaccine is given as an injection into your upper arm. It's given as 2 doses, at least 21 days apart.

Can the vaccine cause coronavirus?

No. You can't get coronavirus from the vaccine.

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine does not contain any live virus.

How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine?

After having both doses of the vaccine most people will be protected against coronavirus.

It will start to work about a week after you have the second dose.

There is a small chance you might still get coronavirus even if you have the vaccine. It is possible that patients with haemoglobinopathies may not respond as well to the vaccine as the general population and it is not clear how long the protection against the virus will last.

This means it is important to:

- continue to follow social distancing guidance
- you should continue to wear a face covering in places where it's hard to stay away from other people

What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Most side effects are mild and should not last longer than a week, such as:

- a sore arm where the needle went in
- feeling tired
- a headache
- feeling achy



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You can take painkillers, such as paracetamol, if you need to.

It's very rare for anyone to have a serious reaction to the vaccine (anaphylaxis). If this does happen, it usually happens within minutes.

Staff giving the vaccine are trained to deal with allergic reactions and treat them immediately.

COVID-19 vaccine ingredients

The COVID-19 vaccine does not contain any animal products or egg.

Are there any groups of patients who should NOT receive the vaccine?

There is very limited data on safety and efficacy of vaccination in children and young people and COVID-19 vaccines are not routinely recommended for children and young people under 16 years of age.

People with a history of a significant allergic reaction to a vaccine, medicine or food (such as previous history of anaphylactoid or anaphylactic reaction or those who have been advised to carry an adrenaline autoinjector) should not receive the Pfizer BioNtech vaccine

COVID-19 vaccination is not currently advised in pregnancy or if breastfeeding.

Can the vaccination be given to those who have had previous COVID-19?

Individuals who have a past history of COVID-19 infection or who have COVID-19 antibody can be vaccinated

If you need further information:

Discuss with your clinical team. More information can be found here.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/>

This has been produced in collaboration between multidisciplinary clinical forum (National Haemoglobinopathy Panel and UK Forum on Haemoglobin Disorders) and patient organisations (UK Thalassaemia Society and Sickle Cell Society).

Information in this statement is likely to change rapidly. Advice should be based on updated advice and will depend on the individual clinical situation.