



**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON
HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS AND
COVID-19 VACCINES**



Thank You!

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1 WHAT IS VACCINATION?

Vaccination is a safe, simple and effective way to protect everyone against harmful diseases before coming in contact with the disease. It makes the immune system stronger to build resistance against disease-causing germs. Once vaccinated, an individual will have a level of protection (or immunity), against that specific harmful disease. Once administered into the body, vaccines trigger a response from the immune system and do not cause the disease.

2 HOW DO VACCINES WORK?

A vaccine trains your immune system to recognize the virus and combat viruses/bacteria using the antibodies it has formed. When exposed, antibodies are naturally produced by the immune system to fight the disease. If the bacteria or virus reappears, the immune system will remember how to respond and quickly destroy it.

3 WHAT IS AN IMMUNE SYSTEM?

An immune system is the body's own way of fighting and protecting itself against germs (bacteria and viruses) that cause diseases. Individuals with a strong immune system can resist or recover fast from a particular disease.

4 WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE TO BE VACCINATED?

Vaccination remains the most cost effective public health intervention currently available to prevent disease and save lives. When you receive a vaccine, you will be better protected against that disease. The more people are vaccinated; the virus struggles to spread. Vaccines are used for several diseases such as smallpox, polio, measles, tetanus and whooping cough and many lives have been saved from these diseases.

5 ARE COVID-19 VACCINES SAFE?

Vaccines are safe as they have undergone a thorough scientific testing process by the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) to prove that they meet internationally agreed standards for safety and efficacy, prior to their approval for use. Vaccines do not infect people with disease that they are being vaccinated for.



18 **IF I DIDN'T GET MY SECOND SHOT OF A 2-DOSE OF COVID-19 VACCINE WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED TIME, WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

You should get your second shot as close to the recommended 3-week or 4-week interval as possible. However, if you receive your second shot of COVID-19 vaccine at any time after the recommended date, you do not have to restart the vaccine series.

19 **IF I ALREADY HAD COVID-19 AND RECOVERED, AM I PROTECTED BY NATURAL IMMUNITY, OR DO I STILL NEED TO GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?**

You should get a COVID-19 vaccine even if you already had COVID-19.

Getting sick with COVID-19 offers some protection from future illness with COVID-19, sometimes called "natural immunity." The level of protection people get from having COVID-19 may vary depending on how mild or severe their illness was, the time since their infection, and their age. No currently available test can reliably determine if a person is protected from infection.

20 **DO I STILL NEED TO WEAR A MASK?**

Yes, all people even those who are vaccinated still need to wear a mask. This is because you can become infected with the coronavirus and be asymptomatic even when vaccinated. Asymptomatic people can still spread COVID-19 to others. We don't know whether a vaccine prevents asymptomatic infections and if a possibility exists that a vaccinated person could transmit the virus without knowing it.

21 **DO I NEED TO GET TESTED FOR COVID-19 BEFORE RECEIVING EITHER DOSE OF VACCINE?**

No, you do not need to get tested for COVID-19 prior to receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. If you are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or have known current COVID-19 infection, you should not get vaccinated until after you have recovered.

6 **WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?**

COVID 19 vaccines can cause mild side effects which disappear within few days such as low grade fever or pain at the injection site, just like any other vaccine. In instances where a person experiences a side effect that they are concerned about, they must immediately report to their health care provider to get some assistance.

7 **WHICH VACCINATION CAMPAIGNS ARE CURRENTLY TAKING PLACE IN SCHOOLS?**

The two vaccination campaigns currently taking place in schools are:

- i) COVID-19 vaccination campaign using the Pfizer Comirnaty vaccine; and
- ii) Human Papillomavirus Virus (HPV) vaccination campaign for prevention of cervical cancer using the Cervarix vaccine.

8 **WHICH LEARNERS SHOULD RECEIVE THESE VACCINES**

For COVID-19: All learners in public and independent primary and secondary schools who are 12 years and above, are eligible to be vaccinated.

For HPV vaccination: Only grade 5 girls in all public primary and special schools. Girls in the upper grades may be vaccinated if they missed one dose so as to complete the vaccination series of two doses received in the previous years.

9 **WHAT IS SIMILAR IN THESE VACCINES?**

- i) Both vaccines are available to learners at no cost to the parents of guardians. Parents who decide to get the HPV vaccine from their private doctors or pharmacies will have to pay for it.
- ii) Both vaccines are given as an injection in the upper arm (Recommended arm for COVID 19 vaccine is left arm).
- iii) Both vaccines are given as two doses to complete the vaccination series.

10 WHAT IS THE INTERVAL (TIMING) BETWEEN THE FIRST AND THE SECOND DOSES OF BOTH VACCINES?

For COVID-19: The interval between the first and second dose of the Pfizer Comirnaty vaccine is 21 days.

Important: Individuals who have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 COVID-19 or have had COVID-19 symptoms should wait a minimum of 30 days after recovery to receive a Pfizer Comirnaty vaccine

For HPV vaccine: The interval between the first and the second dose is a minimum of five to six months.

11 CAN THE COVID-19 AND THE HPV VACCINATION BE GIVEN AT THE SAME TIME?

Yes, they can be given on the same day, at the same time, but they should be given on different arms (Recommended arm for COVID 19 vaccine is left arm). On the vaccination card issued to learners, it should also be specified which vaccine was administered in which arm.

12 WHICH OTHER PLACES CAN LEARNERS GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Parents/ guardians/caregivers are encouraged to take their children to the following vaccination sites:

- i) The nearest COVID-19 vaccination sites.
- ii) Temporary site also known as the 'the pop-up site' in their community that will be set for short period so that the community and learners can be vaccinated.
- iii) Visit their nearest health facility or pharmacy.

13 WHICH OTHER PLACES CAN LEARNERS GET THE HPV VACCINE?

This vaccine is given in the form of a campaign (specified period) at the public primary and special schools for girls aged 9 to 12 through the Integrated School Health Programme. Parents who decide to get the HPV vaccine from their private doctors or pharmacies will have to pay for it.

14 WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO FOR LEARNERS TO GET THESE VACCINES?

Parents/ caregivers/guardians are urged to sign the consent forms that will be provided to the by schools for their children to receive vaccinations when the opportunity to do so arises. Although children 12 years and above can consent to being vaccinated, those who will be vaccinated through the in-school vaccination programme or the Integrated School Health programme will require parental consent prior to being vaccinated.

15 WHAT OTHER SUPPORT CAN PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS PROVIDE FOR THE VACCINATION PROGRAMME?

If their children qualify to receive vaccines are not vaccinated by the end of March 2022, they should contact the school or inform the school principal in writing so that an arrangement can be made with the relevant authorities for the service to be offered.

16 IS IT SAFE TO GET A COVID-19 VACCINE AT THE SAME TIME AS OTHER VACCINES, LIKE FLU?

You can get a COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines, including a flu vaccine, at the same visit. Experience with other vaccines has shown that the way our bodies develop protection, known as an immune response, and possible side effects after getting vaccinated are generally the same when given alone or with other vaccines. Learn more about the timing of other vaccines.

17 CAN I GET VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19 WHILE I AM CURRENTLY SICK WITH COVID-19?

No. People with COVID-19 who have symptoms should not be vaccinated until they have recovered from their illness and have met the criteria for discontinuing isolation. Those without symptoms should also wait until they meet the criteria before getting vaccinated. This guidance also applies to people who get COVID-19 before getting their second dose of vaccine. If a person is unsure whether they are sick or not, they should seek guidance from the health care work (nurse or doctor) on whether vaccinate or not.