

FAQs about COVID-19 Vaccine

February 1, 2021

1-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.

2-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, allergic reactions were observed.

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

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

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

This period ranges between three to four weeks.

5- 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.

6- 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.

7- 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.

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

No

9- After the emergence of new strains of Covid-19, does the Covid-19 vaccine provide protection against these new virus strains?

Current available vaccines (mRNA) provide protection against the new strain.

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

The effectiveness of available vaccines hasn't been tested on pregnant and breastfeeding women, so we recommend that you consult your physician.

11- Is it safe to give the Covid-19 vaccine to children? If yes, at what age?

The vaccine is not licensed for use in children under 16 years of age.

12- Is it safe for people with chronic diseases to take the vaccine?

People with chronic diseases will have priority in Covid-19 vaccination. It is preferable to speak with your doctor to discuss whether or not to get vaccinated.

People who suffer from severe allergic reactions to the components of the vaccine (which is very rare) or who suffer from severe diseases or have a fever on the day scheduled for taking the vaccine should not take it.

13- Should people with special needs take the Covid-19 vaccine?

Yes

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

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

16- Did the vaccine pass all the phases of the clinical trial, prior to approval by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)?

Yes, it passed the first 3 phases. The fourth phase is usually based on monitoring after approval. The vaccine received emergency use authorization by the FDA.

17- 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.

18- This is a frequently asked question: if I was previously infected with Covid-19, do I still need to get vaccinated? Is there a specific vaccine that I should take or any available vaccine? And when is it safest to take it?

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 for up to six months after infection and will be protected from the virus.

19- Can a person who has been vaccinated still contract coronavirus without any symptoms?

Yes, an individual who has been vaccinated still has the ability to contract the coronavirus, although he’s more likely to be asymptomatic, which is why he must practice preventive measures.

20- Can vaccination cause asymptomatic coronavirus?

No, this is not possible for the mRNA vaccine

21- 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.

Vaccine purchase, storage and distribution in Lebanon

22- 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.

23- 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.

24- 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.

25- 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.

26- What agencies are part of the discussions related to purchasing the vaccine in Lebanon?

The Ministry of Public Health has formed a national committee to manage the Covid-19 vaccination file; which includes independent experts, representatives from the: Doctors Syndicate, the Nurses Union, the Lebanese Society for Bacterial Diseases, WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNHCR, UNRWA The Lebanese Red Cross, in

addition to the concerned parties in the Ministry of Public Health. Military medicine and security forces, the Dental Association and Arcenciell (an association specialized in treating medical waste) were also consulted.

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

The Lebanese state will purchase 1.5 million 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.

28- When will the Covid-19 vaccine become available in Lebanon?

In mid-February, the vaccine will be delivered in batches.

29- Who are the parties and segments that will first receive the Covid-19 vaccine in Lebanon?

The priority groups for vaccination campaigns have been identified according to the following criteria:

- The risk of exposure to the virus and infection
- The risk of serious complications from infection
- The segments that are considered essential to maintain: a good response to the "Covid 19" pandemic, the primary health care system, and the smooth functioning of society and its natural cycle.

Groups who should receive the first doses of Covid-19 vaccines:

Phase 1 A:

- Healthcare personnel in the public and private sector
- People aged 75 and above, irrespective of any chronic diseases they may suffer from

Phase 1B:

- People aged 65-74 years, irrespective of any chronic diseases they may suffer from
- People aged 55-64 years who suffer from one or more chronic diseases
- Workers in the field of epidemiological surveillance who are affiliated with the Ministry of Public Health

Phase 2 A:

- People aged 55-64, who were not previously covered by the vaccination
- People aged 16-54 years who suffer from one or more chronic diseases
- Primary health care workers who were not previously vaccinated

Phase 2B:

- Individuals who are necessary to maintain the smooth functioning of society
- People and workers in care facilities for the elderly, individuals with special needs, and prisons

Phase 3:

- Teachers of different grades (from kindergarten to grade 12), school personnel, and nursery personnel.
- Other workers in places with a high risk of transmission
- Other workers in the primary health care sector.
- People caring for members of their family aged 65 and above, or with special needs.

Phases 4:

All individuals who want to get the vaccine

Chronic diseases according to worldwide and Lebanese statistical data

- Dialysis patients
- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Obesity (BMI 40 kg / m²)
- Cancer patients (especially haematological malignancies and lung cancer)
- Chronic kidney disease and kidney transplant patients
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma
- People who are immunocompromised for any reason (HIV / AIDS, TB)
- Other chronic diseases (including but not limited to: neurological diseases, rheumatic diseases, patients with multiple sclerosis)

30- 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.

31- Which healthcare facilities will offer vaccination?

In the first phase, vaccination centers will be set up in the main hospitals in Lebanon. A detailed list of approved vaccination centers will be published at a later date.

32- 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.

33- Who will be responsible for the safety of the vaccine?

The Lebanese state passed a law pertaining to the use of medical products in cases of emergency.

34- 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.

35- 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, the National Committee for the Management of Covid-19 Vaccine will carry out periodic inspections.

36- 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 disease, 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.

37- Can I get the vaccine through my doctor?

No. In the early stages, the vaccine will only be secured through centers / hospitals that have been authorized for vaccination.

38- How can I get the vaccine?

1- Register on the electronic platform that was launched:

- Through unions / groups or individually via the mobile phone or through the call center / Covid-19 vaccine hotline number.
- 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 is directed to the manual sterilization station through the entrance
- The beneficiary's data is verified, then he/she is registered and directed to the seat assigned to him/her in the waiting area, after explaining the benefits and risks of the vaccine and after making sure that there are no contraindications to vaccination through a prepared list of questions.

3- Administration of the vaccine:

- The beneficiary is called to the vaccination clinic
- The beneficiary confirms the details with the service provider (triple verification: full name, ID number and identification number of the text message received from the Ministry of Public Health) while the health worker / doctor prepares the vaccine
- The beneficiary is vaccinated and provided with a vaccination card
- The beneficiary is asked to wait in the monitoring area

4- After receiving the vaccine

- Notifying the beneficiary about the expected side effects
- After a 15-minute waiting period, the beneficiary is allowed to leave the vaccination center
- Beneficiaries with a known vaccine allergy are asked to wait for 30 minutes
- Remind beneficiaries of the second dose via SMS or email
- The beneficiary is asked to report any side effects to the center from which he/she received the vaccine or via the Covid-19 vaccine call center.

39- Is Covid-19 vaccination optional?

Yes

40- 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.

Vaccination and Immunology

41- 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.

42- 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.

43- 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. We need additional research to answer this question.

Most of the Covid-19 vaccines that are currently being tested or observed are given in two doses, three to four weeks apart.

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

No. They have nothing to do with each other because they are different viruses.

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

No, they are two different viruses.

46- Can a person who received the Covid-19 vaccine become infected with the virus?

Studies have shown that the vaccine can protect against severe infection, but mild or moderate symptoms can still occur.

47- 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.

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

When an individual is vaccinated against a disease, the risk of infection also decreases – as such he/she is less likely to pass the virus on to others, yet he/she must continue to take preventive measures.

49- 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.