



COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

17 February 2021

COVID-19 Vaccination **Frequently Asked Questions**

The Oxford AstraZeneca Vaccine is being made available to all persons on St Helena aged 18 and above. All eligible persons are encouraged to be vaccinated in order to protect the population of St Helena against COVID-19.

Keeping the community safe from COVID-19

What are the advantages of being vaccinated?

Having the full course of the vaccine reduces your chances of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19.

Why is it important to get the COVID-19 vaccination?

St Helena has established preventative measures against COVID-19 in place, including restricted access to the island, quarantine and testing. The vaccination programme is the next step in continuing to protect our community.

Having the full course of the vaccine reduces your chances of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19. This has obvious benefits for you as an individual but if you have the vaccine it also helps the entire community.

This is because reducing the risk of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19 also reduces the potential impacts on the Health service on St Helena should we have COVID-19 cases. This greatly assists St Helena's response to COVID-19.

Why are we being offered the vaccination when COVID-19 is not on the island?

The St Helena Government has put several preventative steps against COVID-19 in place but there will always be a chance that COVID-19 will reach the island. Therefore it is important that the population receive the vaccine, to decrease the risk of becoming seriously ill if COVID-19 was to reach the wider community on the island.

Is it mandatory, and what happens if I don't want to receive the vaccine?

There are no plans for COVID-19 vaccines to be compulsory on St Helena. St Helena Government will be working hard to ensure all eligible members of the population are able to get vaccinated, and that any concerns that the population have are answered.

We are confident that the vast majority of our population will choose to protect themselves and the island by getting the vaccine.

Will there be a cost to receiving the vaccine?

No, the COVID-19 vaccination is available to eligible groups and it is a free vaccination.

The Oxford AstraZeneca Vaccine

What vaccine will St Helena be using?

Through partnerships with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Crown Agents, the St Helena Government has secured deliveries of the Oxford AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine. The Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine is being used in St Helena because its storage temperature is 2-8°C, the same temperature as a regular fridge. This makes it easier to transport, store and distribute the vaccine.

How is the AstraZeneca Vaccine made?

The vaccine is made from a weakened version of a common cold virus (known as an Adenovirus). The vaccine uses a weakened adenovirus (a common cold virus) to carry the genetic material of SARS-CoV2, the virus that causes COVID-19, which is then injected into the human body. This virus and the genetic material do not cause a disease.

How does the vaccine work?

The AstraZeneca vaccine is injected into a muscle (usually in the upper arm). You will need to receive two injections. The second injection can be given between 3 and 12 weeks after the first injection.

The vaccine works by stimulating the body's immune system, causing the body to react to the vaccine by producing antibodies. These antibodies then fight against the virus, should you be exposed to it.

It takes a while for the body to start producing antibodies, so you will not start to be protected until several days to two weeks after receiving the first dose. After the second dose your body will continue to strengthen its immunisation against the virus. You will only receive the full effective protection of the vaccine after having both doses.

What's in the vaccine?

The AstraZeneca vaccine contains a modified harmless form of a different virus as its active ingredient (the Adenovirus). It contains genetically modified material.

The inactive ingredients are chemicals to make up the vaccine solution, which are common in many medicines. They are: L-Histidine; L-Histidine hydrochloride monohydrate; magnesium chloride hexahydrate; polysorbate 80; ethanol; sucrose; sodium chloride; disodium edetate dehydrate; and water.

When will the vaccine be available on St Helena?

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office supplied the St Helena Government with 100 doses of the vaccine on the January flight. These were used to vaccinate frontline workers.

3,800 doses of the vaccine are expected on the February flight with a further delivery expected on the March flight.

How many doses of the vaccine will be required and when?

You are required to have two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, to be taken between 3 - 12 weeks apart. You will get a good level of protection from the first dose but will not get maximum protection until at least 7 to 14 days after your second dose of vaccine.

We expect to administer the first dose to the majority of the St Helenian population in March 2021 and the second dose in April 2021.

How effective is the vaccine?

The efficacy rate of the vaccine is between 60 – 70%.

How long does the vaccine last?

We don't yet know exactly how long protection will last, because the COVID-19 vaccines have not been around for long enough.

The second dose is more important for longer-lasting protection, so it is really important to go back for your second dose when you are invited for it.

Will I need a booster shot at some point in the future?

We don't know the answer to this yet as the vaccine has not been around for long enough. We do know that at the time of writing it has been 5 months since people first received the vaccine and that it remains effective in their systems.

We will only learn how long protection from the vaccine will last in the fullness of time. Various studies are underway to monitor and assess this.

Your Safety

Does receiving the vaccine mean that I will be infected with COVID-19?

No. None of the ingredients in this vaccine can cause COVID-19.

Is the St Helena Government confident the vaccine will be safe?

Yes.

As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process, and continued monitoring once it has been authorised and is being used in the wider population.

The AstraZeneca vaccine has been through a full assurance process. It has met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness set out by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). The MHRA follows international standards of safety.

How was the vaccine developed so quickly?

Because of the global pandemic, developing this 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.

Scientists used the knowledge gained in the past, when developing vaccines against other coronaviruses, which helped in developing a specific SARS-CoV2 relatively quickly.

What are the potential side-effects of having the vaccine?

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short-term, and not everyone gets them. For the AstraZeneca vaccine, like lots of other vaccines, they have identified that some people might feel slightly unwell, but they report that no significant side effects have been observed in the tens of thousands of people involved in trials.

Very common side effects 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
- having a temperature

If I don't get side-effects, does this mean the vaccine did not 'take'?

No, it simply means that you are amongst the majority of people who do not experience side-effects from the vaccine.

Who cannot have the vaccine?

COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca should not be given to those who have had a previous systemic allergic reaction (including immediate-onset anaphylaxis) to:

- A previous dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine
- Any component (excipient) of the vaccine, (Full list below)
 - L-histidine
 - L-histidine hydrochloride monohydrate
 - magnesium chloride hexahydrate
 - polysorbate 80
 - ethanol
 - sucrose
 - sodium chloride
 - disodium edetate dihydrate

I have an underlying medical condition. Is it OK for me to have the vaccine?

The vaccine does not contain living organisms and is therefore safe for most individuals, even those with underlying conditions (including diabetes and hypertension which are amongst two of the most common conditions on St Helena).

What if I suffer from a rare condition and am currently taking medication for this. Must I stop taking my medication or increase my intake to reduce the risk of side effects?

In cases such as this, your treatment will affect your immune response and therefore you are at higher risk of having a severe response should you catch the SARS-Cov2 virus, in other words you are at higher risk of having severe COVID-19 disease if you are exposed to it. Therefore, you are strongly advised to receive the two doses of the vaccine.

There are no special considerations to be taken regarding your regular medications. You should continue taking these.

Side effects occurred in 6-7% of the 107 people who received the vaccine on our island first: these were all minor effects and lasted for short period of time.

If you should experience mild side-effects, you should rest and rest and take the normal dose of paracetamol (follow the advice in the packaging) to help make you feel better.

Can women who are pregnant or breastfeeding have the vaccine?

Although pregnant and breastfeeding women were at first not eligible for the vaccine, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and the UK's Chief Medical Officers have reviewed the evidence and say that the benefits of vaccine outweigh the risks for pregnant women whose risk of exposure to the virus is high and cannot be avoided, or where the woman has underlying conditions that place her at very high risk of serious complications of Covid-19. For women trying to become pregnant, the vaccine doesn't mean they should delay that, and it's also ok to have the vaccine if you are breastfeeding.

Please consult Dr Francisco Milian, the Gynaecologist at the General Hospital on tel. 22500, if you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding. It is still possible

to be vaccinated for COVID-19 but we will need to discuss on a case by case basis.

Can children have the vaccine?

It is not currently planned to be given to under 18, as the vaccines haven't been tested in this age group. Only children at very high risk of catching the virus and of becoming seriously ill from it, such as older children with severe neuro-disabilities in residential care, will be offered vaccination.

Does the vaccine contain animal products?

The AstraZeneca vaccine uses a harmless, weakened version of a common cold virus (known as an Adenovirus). The virus was grown in human stem cells. The vaccine itself does not contain any human or animal cells.

Is the vaccine vegan/vegetarian friendly?

There is no material of human or animal origin, including eggs, in the AstraZeneca vaccine. All ingredients are published in healthcare information on the MHRA's website. For the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, information is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca>

Is the vaccine compatible with my religion?

Most religious bodies and associations around the world have recommended that COVID-19 vaccines be used. If you need more information in connection with your faith, please discuss with your religious leader.

What does having the vaccine mean in practical terms?

If I get vaccinated, does this mean that I am then positive for COVID-19? Will I have to quarantine?

No. None of the ingredients in this vaccine can cause COVID-19. You will not need to quarantine.

Will getting vaccinated mean that I will be unable to get COVID-19?

Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective. Some people may still get COVID-19 despite having had a vaccination. However, the advantage of being vaccinated is that it reduces your chances of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19.

Can I give COVID-19 to anyone if I have had the vaccine?

The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 infection, and a full course will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill. We do not yet know whether it will stop you from catching and passing on the virus. So, it is still important to follow the guidance and adhere to the rules of quarantine.

Will I still need to follow infection control and testing measures?

Whilst the vaccine will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill, it will take a few weeks for your body to build up protection. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective. Some people may still get COVID-19 despite having had a vaccination.

The vaccine programme is therefore just one measure in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It needs to be considered alongside our testing and quarantine regimes. As a very basic step, it is important that you continue to take sensible precautions such as following best practice for hand and respiratory hygiene.

Will the vaccines work with the new strains?

Scientists are looking now in detail at the characteristics of the virus in relation to the vaccines.

Viruses often branch into different strains but these small variations rarely render vaccines ineffective.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and CDC Africa recommend the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine. See, for example, <https://africacdc.org/news-item/statement-on-the-efficacy-of-the-astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine-chadox1-ncov-19-against-the-sars-cov-2-variants/>

Will the COVID-19 vaccine protect me from flu?

No, the AstraZeneca vaccine will not protect you against the flu. If you are offered a flu vaccine later in the year, please try to have it to help protect you, your family and the island from flu in this year's winter.

Who will be vaccinated and when

When will I get the vaccine?

The vaccination programme is based on the following order of priority.

Priority Group Number	Priority Group
Group 1	Health care workers , frontline and quarantine staff
Group 2	Long term care facilities residents and staff, Prison residents and staff
Group 3	Extremely clinically vulnerable target group
Group 4	People aged 55 and older
Group 5	Rest of the population

When you receive the vaccine will depend on which group you are in.

Some frontline workers have received their first dose of the vaccine, as part of the 100 doses that arrived in January. We are planning for the arrival of a further delivery of the AstraZeneca vaccine on the February flight.

St Helena's vaccination programme aims for members of Groups 1, 2 and 3 to receive their first dose of the vaccine in March, with Groups 4 and 5 starting to be offered the vaccine in April.

If you are in Groups 1-3, we will contact you directly to invite you to be vaccinated. Further information will then follow for those in Groups 4 and 5 (as larger numbers will be in these groups we will let you know when you can book an appointment).

Please note: the St Helena Government is asking people not to contact the Health Directorate to ask for the vaccine.

How did you come up with the priority order?

The priority order of the five groups has been recommended by the Health Directorate based on:

- risk of exposure to COVID-19;
- risk of vulnerability to COVID-19.

This approach has been agreed with the Public Health Committee.

Why are frontline workers the first group to receive the vaccine?

As St Helena is currently COVID-19 free, the only potential source of infection is arrivals to the island. Therefore the staff who have critical roles in managing the arrivals process (including quarantine to St Helena and the staff who would have critical roles in managing a positive case of COVID-19) have been prioritised to receive the vaccine.

Following the receipt of the first delivery of AstraZeneca vaccines on the flight on 11 January, the Health Directorate commenced vaccinations for key frontline workers. 107 frontline workers have received their first dose of the vaccine whilst 10 critical staff members from the Health Directorate who form the team at Bradley's Hospital will receive both the first and second dose of the vaccine. This allowed us to vaccinate most of the frontline workers involved in the February flight.

Our priority is then to ensure all frontline workers have the opportunity to be vaccinated.

How will I know if I am in the extremely clinically vulnerable target group?

COVID-19 can make anyone seriously ill but, for some people, the risk is higher. People at high risk (extremely clinically vulnerable) are those who are immunosuppressed or immunocompromised. For example:

- Someone who has had an organ transplant
- Someone with cancer who is currently receiving chemotherapy with cancer and are currently receiving chemotherapy
- Someone with a severe lung condition (mainly COPD and Asthma)
- Someone on medication that makes them at higher risk of severe illness

I have diabetes and hypertension but I have not been contacted yet. Why am I not being prioritised?

Our prioritisation is based on risk of exposure to COVID-19 and extreme vulnerability should an individual contract COVID-19. Please see above for the priority order for receiving the vaccine.

We will have sufficient doses of vaccine to protect our community. We are aiming to complete the roll-out of the Vaccine Programme within the next 2-3 months.

Receiving the vaccine

How will I be notified when it is my time to receive the vaccine?

If you are in Groups 1, 2 or 3 the Health Directorate will contact you shortly via letter to make you aware that you have been prioritised to receive the vaccine. We will provide you with the dates and locations that we will be administering the vaccine and ask you to confirm with our Appointments Clerk when you would like to attend.

Further information will follow for Groups 4 and 5.

Do I need to take any paperwork with me when I get my vaccine?

No, but do remember to take your reading glasses if you need them, as you will need to complete a consent form prior to having your vaccine. This paperwork will be completed on the day and just prior to you receiving your vaccine.

What will happen at my vaccine appointment?

Each appointment will go through the following steps:

Step 1:

There will be an opportunity to have a discussion with a staff member from the Health Directorate, should you have any last minute questions. When you are content to proceed, we will ask you to sign a simple consent form.

Step 2:

We will administer the vaccine. This is a simple injection to the muscle of your upper arm. This stage takes less than 3 minutes.

Step 3:

We will provide you with a post-vaccination leaflet that sets out the next steps. For example, the leaflet will remind you of the potential side-effects and provide guidance on what to do should you feel unwell following the vaccination.

Remember, side-effects occur in a minority of cases and are generally mild.

Step 4:

We will ask you to have a seat in our observation area for 15 minutes. This short rest period allows us to ensure that you are not experiencing any immediate side-effects before you leave the vaccination centre.

This is a precautionary measure only. Remember, side-effects occur only in a minority of cases and are generally mild.

A member of staff will tell you when you can leave.

How is the vaccine administered?

Usually through an injection to the muscle of the upper arm, if it is not medically viable for a person to receive an injection in this area, they might receive the injection in their buttock or upper thigh.

Can I choose what arm to be injected in and can I have the first dose in one arm and the second in the other?

Provided you have sufficient muscle mass, you can choose which arm you prefer to have the injection in and can elect to have each dose in a different arm if you wish.

Can I choose to receive my injection elsewhere in my body?

No, you cannot. Most people will receive the vaccine via an injection to the muscle of the upper arm. In cases where this is not possible, an alternative site will be determined by healthcare professionals and not by the individual patient. This is due to the need to optimise the effectiveness of the vaccine and minimise the potential for adverse reactions – both of which are clinical judgements.

Will SHG provide everyone with a document to say that they have been vaccinated?

Everyone will receive a card, following their second dose, which states that they have been fully immunised.

What happens if I get unwell having had the vaccine?

Only a minority of people experience side-effects from the vaccine. These are generally mild, such as pain/redness/swelling/tenderness at the injection site.

Some people may also experience mild flu-like symptoms including fever, fatigue, headache, general aches or chills. If you feel very tired or unwell you should rest and avoid operating machinery or driving.

Your post-vaccination leaflet will contain a name and contact number within the Health Directorate to contact for advice should you experience side-effects.

If you should experience side-effects and if your symptoms last for more than one week, you will likely need to see a member of our Medical Team. In this case, please contact the General Hospital on telephone 22500 and advise that you have concerns following your vaccination. Your post-vaccination leaflet will provide further guidance.

When will I likely receive my second dose of the vaccine?

The Health Directorate is aiming to give everyone their second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine 4 weeks after receiving the first dose.

Will St Helena Government be postponing administering the second doses, like in the UK?

No. The Health Directorate is aiming to vaccinate as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. Considering the size of our population and the relatively easier logistics than in the UK, we will not need to consider delaying the second dose of the vaccine.

Returning to work after having the vaccine

Can I go back to work after having my vaccine?

Yes, you should be able to work as long as you feel well. If your arm is particularly sore, you may find heavy lifting difficult. If you feel unwell or very tired you should rest and avoid operating machinery or driving.

The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19 infection, and two doses will reduce your chance of becoming seriously ill.

What happens if I get side-effects and have to take sick leave? Will I still be paid?

Please discuss this question with your employer.

What happens if I don't have the vaccine?

Can I change my mind and have the vaccine at a later date?

Yes but this is only possible for a limited period. We would encourage everyone to participate in the current Vaccination Programme.

For a short period we will have a very small stock of vaccines available so that if you opt out of the current vaccination programme, you can still be vaccinated at a later date. Please contact the Health Directorate.

If I don't get the vaccine do I still have to go to work if I'm a frontline worker?

Yes, you will still be expected to work if you have not received the vaccine.

Our response to COVID-19 is based on our testing regime, our quarantine regime and our vaccination programme. It is a combination of these three elements and not based solely on the vaccination programme.

As a frontline worker, you will already have SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) in place to ensure that your role can be carried out at minimal risk. This includes the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE), physical distancing and hygiene measures such as hand washing and cleaning.

The Longer-Term

Will we require people coming to St Helena to provide proof of having been vaccinated?

This is not the current policy and it would be a political decision should it be introduced. The St Helena Government has a system in place to regularly review its COVID-19 protocols to ensure that they are still suitable for the protection of public health; this includes looking at all of the latest evidence and determining where changes to existing measures may be necessary.

It is important to remember that every country is having to vaccinate its people and that for nations with big populations, it will take them longer to be able to vaccinate everyone who needs it.

If frontline workers have been vaccinated, does that mean that people entering the island will no longer be required to quarantine?

There are no immediate changes planned to quarantine arrangements.

St Helena's response to COVID-19 is composed of our testing regime, our quarantine regime and our vaccination programme. Whilst there are no immediate changes planned, the St Helena Government has a system in place to regularly review its COVID-19 protocols to ensure that they are still suitable for the protection of public health; this includes looking at all of the latest evidence and determining where changes to existing measures may be necessary.

Miscellaneous Questions

How are you raising awareness of the vaccine with the St Helena population?

St Helena Government is developing a campaign to raise awareness of the vaccine with the public. This includes specific engagement with all parts of the community and workforces. In addition to this set of FAQs, please also look out for our posters, press releases and presentations. We are also planning discussions on local radio.

Where to obtain further information

I have a question. Who can I speak to regarding the vaccination programme?

Please contact communitycovid-19@sainthelena.gov.sh or call the Castle switchboard on tel: 22470 where you will be signposted to a relevant officer.

References

Some of the questions and answers have been adapted from the following resources:

- The NHS COVID-19 Vaccination Programme: Communications resources: pull-out guide for staff uptake campaigns
- [British Heart Foundation: Coronavirus vaccine: your questions answered](#)
- [Falkland Islands Government COVID-19 Information and Resources: Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions](#)