

# VACCINES:

## Your questions answered



**'Play your part: protect yourself and loved ones'**

Dr Nikki Kanani is a GP in London and medical director of primary care for NHS England and NHS Improvement

**Q** What would you say to someone who was thinking: "I'm young, fit and healthy, I don't get the flu jab - so why do I need the Covid vaccine?"

**A** The average age of people in intensive care is about 60, but we do have people much younger than that who have been really ill - and have died as well. Thousands more people are suffering the effects of long Covid or post-Covid syndrome after a relatively mild initial case of Covid. It's not just about protecting you, but you helping to protect others and helping us all get back to seeing the people we love again and doing the things we love again.

**Q** What would you say to people who have parents or grandparents who don't



**trust the vaccine? How can we help them make an informed decision?**

**A** The take up among the over-60s has been really encouraging, about nine out of ten people coming forward to protect themselves, but some people still need to feel more confident. The best approach is to listen to those concerns, because they're often very valid. They're worried about what's in the vaccine or what might happen to them after they've had it. I'd recommend the nhs.uk website for advice.

We want to hug our parents and our grandparents and - quite apart from all the data that's out there on how safe and effective the vaccines are - vaccination is our best hope of doing the things that we love sooner rather than later.

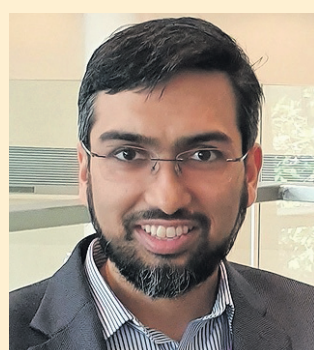
**Q** There are some people who think: "If everybody else has had the vaccine, I don't need to bother because of herd immunity." Why is it still important to have it?

**A** We all have a responsibility here. We will not get back to the life that we love unless we all play our part and protect ourselves from the virus by getting the vaccine. The vaccine is really easy to get, it is quick, and it is relatively painless.

**Q** What do we know about how safe the vaccine is for children?

**A** The only reason that we're not offering it to children yet is because the manufacturers haven't completed the trials, but they're ongoing now. I've registered my two children for vaccine trials because there's no reason why it shouldn't be safe.

Over half of UK adults have had the jab thanks to the dedication of NHS workers but some are still hesitant - so our experts are here to help clear up those Covid injection concerns...



**'Your immune response gets stronger'**

Dr Raghib Ali is a senior clinical research associate at the MRC Epidemiology Unit at the University of Cambridge and a frontline doctor

**Q** If you've had Covid-19, so have the antibodies, do you still need the jab?

**A** It's true that having had Covid gives you a degree of protection, but the protection you get from a vaccine is higher, particularly when you have had the second dose, and it will also give you much better protection against new variants.

**Q** Just how effective are the vaccines?

**A** The most recent study on the effect of vaccines from

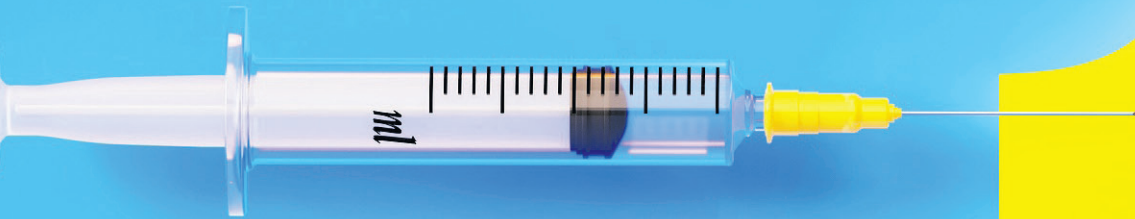
Public Health England shows that they provide a high level of protection, reduce your risk of catching Covid-19, reduce the number of people getting serious Covid and needing hospital treatment, and reduce the number of people who die from it. That's why it's absolutely crucial that everyone gets a vaccine when their time comes.

**Q** I have seen in the press that some people have had really severe allergic reactions to the jab. So how do I know that this won't also happen to me?

**A** Tens of millions of people have already had the vaccine around the world, including here in the UK, where more than half the adult population have had it. Severe allergic reactions are very rare - there have only been a handful of cases. As long as you don't have an allergy in response to the ingredients itself, it is safe to take the vaccine.

**Q** What's the point of getting a vaccine if new variants are on the rise?

**A** There has been concern about some of the variants, such as those that originated in Brazil and South Africa. But we do



now have evidence that the vaccines help prevent infection with these variants, and most importantly still reduce the risk of hospital admissions and death.

**Q** How do the different vaccines work?

**A** The Pfizer vaccine uses a section of the virus's genetic code that is referred to as mRNA. Your

immune system will then produce antibodies and T cells that will be activated if you come across the actual virus in future.

The Oxford vaccine takes a virus that is a bit like the common cold virus, but is completely harmless in humans and the mechanism is the same as the Pfizer vaccine. Neither will give you Covid or change your DNA. Your immune system is ready and produces a much stronger

immune response if you become infected.

**Q** I am 21 and one day want to have babies. What evidence is there that it won't affect my fertility?

**A** There were people who took part in the clinical trials who became pregnant, and many people who have taken the vaccine or who have had Covid and become pregnant, so there's no evidence it will affect fertility.

**Q** What would you say to people who are worried because the vaccine was developed so quickly?

**A** The vaccine has been thoroughly assessed by MHRA - the UK medicines regulator - for its safety and efficacy. The final step of the large clinical trials was much quicker because many more people than usual volunteered. No corners were cut, and the vaccine has involved more people in clinical trials than any other.



**'This is a vaccine for everybody'**

Iyamide Thomas is NHS engagement lead for the Sickle Cell Society

**Q** What's your advice to adults with sickle cell disorder, who are clinically extremely vulnerable?

**A** People with sickle cell have been on the shielding list and we encourage them to take the vaccine. Some have had Covid - data from last September showed that about 6 per cent of the 263

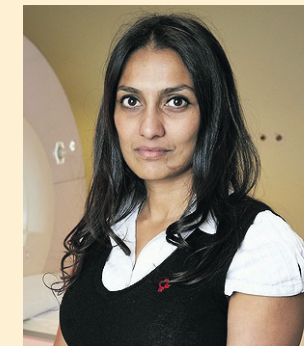
people who had confirmed or suspected Covid died. The vaccine will help because if they get Covid the chances are they could have complications from it.

**Q** Some people are reluctant to take the vaccine. What are their fears?

**A** There's vaccine hesitancy among BAME communities. Sickle cell affects mainly people from BAME communities, but not exclusively. Young people are worried the vaccine will affect their fertility, but there's no evidence to suggest that. People ask if the vaccine affects BAME people in the same way as it does white people. But there's no difference. It's a vaccine for everybody. The evidence is it works the same.

**Q** What would you say to people who remain reticent?

**A** The vaccine has gone through all the tests. There have been no shortcuts. If people put their faith in the NHS for other things, why not consider this as the same? I'd say to people: you have an underlying health condition and you were shielding and you really do not want to be seriously ill with Covid. The vaccine will help you. You have to view the potential benefits against any perceived risks. If you haven't had the vaccine, please do.



**'It's safe for people with heart conditions'**

Dr Sonya Babu-Narayan is associate medical director at the British Heart Foundation

**Q** Are people with heart conditions more at risk from Covid-19?

**A** It was seen very early on in the pandemic that heart and circulatory disease was linked to getting severely ill

or even dying of Covid-19 illness. So now that we have a vaccine to prevent it, people with heart and circulatory diseases are being prioritised to get it sooner.

**Q** Is it potentially risky to have the vaccine if you have a pre-existing heart condition?

**A** No. It is safe for people with heart and circulatory conditions. Like any vaccine, it is only approved because it is considered safe for people with long-term conditions like cardiovascular conditions.

**Q** What about those taking heart medication?

**A** The current vaccines are safe for people taking heart medicines and there's no reason we have to think any heart medication will interact with the vaccine itself.

Some people who are on blood thinners because of their heart condition or related conditions may worry in general about having a vaccine. There's nothing specific about the Covid-19 vaccine injection

compared to any other vaccine. But it's always useful to tell the person giving you your vaccine if you are on a blood thinner, in case it may take a bit longer for the bleeding to stop. You may also get a bigger bruise.

Generally, people who are on blood thinners know that and may be experienced in that sort of thing. This vaccine is no different from any other injection or vaccine, and all the healthcare bodies have said that you can still have your vaccine while you have your blood thinners.

You should just carry on taking them in exactly the normal way, just like any other heart medicine that you're on.



# COVID-19 Vaccine

For further information visit  
[nhs.uk/covidvaccine](https://nhs.uk/covidvaccine)