

## COVID-19 Vaccination for Patients on Anti-Cancer Therapy

### What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

There are many COVID-19 vaccines in development. In the UK, there are currently 2 vaccines available: the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine and the AstraZeneca (Oxford) vaccine.

### Should people who are having anti-cancer therapies - including chemotherapy, immunotherapy, other antibody treatments or radiotherapy - be vaccinated?

#### Yes.

The Department of Health recommends vaccination for people who are immunosuppressed, whether because of disease or treatment.

However, if you are due or have recently had a stem cell transplant, seek advice from your transplant team.

Cancer patients on immune checkpoint inhibitors are also eligible to have the vaccine.

If you suspect have had COVID-19 in the past, you can still have the vaccine. If you have recovered from confirmed COVID-19 you can also have the vaccine.

You should **not** have the vaccine if you currently have confirmed COVID-19. Instead, you need to wait until at least 4 weeks after your first symptoms, or at least 4 weeks after your first positive swab result, if you are asymptomatic.

### Can the vaccine cause COVID-19?

**No.** The vaccines don't contain any live virus, so they cannot cause COVID-19.

### Will the vaccine stop me getting COVID-19?

The aim of vaccination is to reduce the chance of you becoming infected with COVID-19. Some people may still get COVID-19 after vaccination, but the vaccine will reduce the risk of you becoming seriously unwell.

We do not know whether the COVID vaccine will work as well in patients who have had, or are receiving, anti-cancer treatment, or in people with haematological cancers which affect the immune system. However, the benefits of you having the vaccine outweigh any risks.

**After vaccination, remember to continue to follow protective measures including hand washing, mask wearing and social distancing ("hands, face, space"), which will still save lives.**

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## Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for

### people who are having anti-cancer therapies?

The vaccine has been tested in tens of thousands of patients and safety will be very closely monitored by the MHRA. The clinical trials excluded cancer patients, with a few exceptions, but it is not expected that the side effects would be different.

Side effects reported to date have been similar to those seen following other vaccines, such as feeling generally unwell, achy, headache, fatigue and pain at the injection site.

If you do experience any unexpected or severe side effects following the vaccine, please let the team who administered the vaccine know, for example your GP or hospital team.

It is important to also let your oncologist or haematologist know.

### When should the vaccine be given to people who are having chemotherapy or radiotherapy?

Pfizer BioNTech: The vaccine should be administered in 2 doses, a minimum of 21 days apart

AstraZeneca (Oxford) vaccine and Moderna vaccine: The vaccine should be administered in 2 doses, a minimum of 28 days apart

If you are due to start immunosuppressive anti-cancer treatment, having the first dose of the vaccine at least 2 weeks before you begin treatment might allow time for your body to produce antibodies which help protect you against the COVID-19 virus.

However, we do not know when the vaccine will be available for all patients.

It also may be inappropriate to delay starting your chemotherapy until after vaccination.

There is no data on when is the best time to give the vaccine to cancer patients already on treatment.

However, if possible, we suggest the following:

**Chemotherapy:** where possible, giving a few days before your next cycle of chemotherapy.

**Continuous oral anti-cancer therapy:** you may have the vaccine at any point without interrupting your treatment.

**Radiotherapy:** you may have the vaccine at any point without interrupting your treatment.

### Can I have the COVID-19 vaccination at the same time as other vaccines?

Based on current information, you should wait at least 7 days between the COVID-19 vaccine and any other vaccine.

*References:* Department of Health, "The Green Book", Chapter 14a, accessed online via <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a>

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