

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) VACCINES

Providing the best protection for Fiji

Frequently Asked Questions

The Fijian Government will be providing COVID-19 vaccines to all individuals above the age of 18, starting with the most at-risk or vulnerable Fijians to ensure our communities and the country, as a whole, are best protected against the coronavirus.

1. What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccines are vaccines developed to provide acquired immunity or protection against the virus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes the COVID-19 disease, a virus that has claimed more than 2.7 million lives around the world. Currently, the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for use in Fiji in persons aged 18 years and older.

2. Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 can cause severe illnesses and lead to death in some people. There is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you. If you get COVID-19, you could spread the disease to family, friends, and others around you.

Fiji is a COVID-Contained country. However, that does not mean Fijians are immune to the coronavirus. The pandemic cannot end so long as any population remains vulnerable to COVID-19. That is why it is essential that Fijians are vaccinated alongside the rest of the world.

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine can help protect you and those around you from COVID-19, particularly people at increased risk of severe illness and those whose nature of work as frontline or essential workers (e.g. Health staff), exposes them to COVID-19.

3. When did Fiji get its first COVID-19 vaccines?

The Fijian Government received its first supply of 12,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine on 6th March 2021. The country became the first in the Pacific to receive the COVID-19 vaccine doses.

4. Will Fiji receive enough COVID-19 vaccines to vaccinate its population?

Due to limited global supply, Fiji will receive its COVID-19 vaccines in batches, just like many other countries. The Fijian Government is working with the COVAX facility and on a bilateral basis with its development partners to procure enough vaccines to vaccinate all of its target population.

5. Who will receive the COVID-19 vaccines?

For now, due to the limited global supply and high global demand for COVID-19 vaccines, Fiji's vaccines will be prioritized and provided to those who are considered most vulnerable to COVID-19. These groups of individuals have been prioritized because they are either at a higher risk of catching COVID-19 or suffer from underlying health conditions that increase their risk of becoming seriously ill or dying if they get the disease.

Fiji's priority groups who will receive the COVID-19 vaccines first are:

- i. Front-line workers (e.g airport workers, health front-liners, sea-ports, quarantine facility staff, hoteliers working in quarantine facilities, defense forces and some other essential workers) ;
- ii. The rest of the health workers across Fiji, including private practitioners, members of the disciplined forces, persons with existing medical conditions, and family members of front line workers;
- iii. Elderly/Older People 60 years and above; and
- iv. All individuals 18 years and above

6. Why are these groups prioritized?

- i. **Healthcare workers:** Health workers continue to serve on the front line of Fiji's fight against this deadly pandemic. The occupation type, and job settings of healthcare workers place them at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Health care workers are also at a high risk of being exposed to COVID-19 as they provide critical care to those who are or might be infected.
- ii. **Front line workers (e.g. airport workers, health front-liners, sea-ports, quarantine facility staff, hoteliers working in quarantine facilities, disciplined forces and some other essential workers):** The work type and job setting of frontline workers bring them into contact with many people from different places and they are then at an increased risk of exposure to the COVID-19 disease.
- iii. **Adults of any age with certain underlying medical conditions:** People with underlying medical conditions like Stroke, hypertension, asthma, heart disease etc. are at an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and are therefore prioritized for receiving the vaccine.

- iv. **Older People 60 years and above:** Older people, 60 years and above face significant risk of developing severe illness if they contract COVID-19. This is because people's immune systems (which fight diseases) weaken with age, therefore older people can be seriously affected if they get COVID-19.
- v. **All individuals 18 years and above:** At this moment the AstraZeneca Vaccine can be administered to only individuals who are 18 years and above, thus we would like to protect all eligible Fijians.

7. Who is the COVID-19 vaccine not recommended for?

- The vaccine is NOT recommended for persons younger than 18 years of age as there is limited research about its effectiveness in people below 18 years.
- People with a history of severe allergic reaction to vaccinations should consult a doctor before deciding to take the COVID-19 vaccine.

8. Can people with other known allergies be vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccine?

- People with severe allergic reactions to foods, oral medications, latex, pets, insects, and environmental triggers can be safely vaccinated.
- People with severe allergies require a 30-minute observation period after vaccination, while all others must be observed for at least 15-30 minutes. Vaccine clinics or sites will have safety protocols in place to respond to any adverse reactions.
- However, people who experienced a severe allergic reaction when they are given the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine should NOT receive the second dose.

9. Do animals like dogs and cats need to get the COVID-19 vaccine too?

There is no information currently available that household pets like dogs and cats suffer severe illness or spread the virus that causes COVID-19.

10. Where are Fiji's COVID-19 vaccines supplied from?

Fiji's first batch of COVID-19 vaccines are supplied through a global partnership called the COVAX Facility led by Gavi, CEPI, and the World Health Organization (WHO) in partnership with UNICEF.

11. What type of COVID-19 vaccine has Fiji received?

Fiji received the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine in its first batch of COVID-19 vaccines.

12. Do I have to pay anything to receive the COVID-19 vaccines?

The COVID-19 vaccine is free to the public. The Fijian Government and some key Development Partners like DFAT, MFAT, USAID, Japan, WHO and UNICEF are helping absorb all costs associated with the COVID-19 vaccination and its processes.

13. Is the AstraZeneca vaccine as safe and effective as other covid-19 vaccines?

The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine that has been authorized for use in Fiji and has been approved for use in WHO's Emergency Use Listing and in many other countries' regulatory bodies, including Fiji. It is safe and highly effective in reducing COVID-19 infections, protecting against severe diseases in people and reducing hospitalisation.

14. How does the COVID-19 vaccine work?

COVID-19 vaccines work by developing antibodies within your immune system that essentially teach your immune system how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19.

15. How long does the protection from COVID-19 Vaccine last?

It is not yet known how long protection lasts for those who are vaccinated. However, other vaccines using the Oxford ChAdOx1 technology are proven to provide immune responses that can persist for a year or more.

What is known is that COVID-19 has caused very serious illness and death for a lot of people. If you get COVID-19, you also risk giving it to loved ones who may get very sick. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine is a safer choice. Experts are working to learn more about immunity levels.

16. Can pregnant women be vaccinated?

Currently in Fiji, pregnant women do not have to take the COVID-19 vaccine until delivery. Pregnant women who feel that they are at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 (e.g. health worker, front line worker) or have comorbidities which add to their risk of severe disease, may have to consult their health care provider before deciding to take the vaccine.

17. Can lactating women be vaccinated?

Yes. A lactating woman, who is part of a group recommended to receive a COVID-19 vaccine (e.g., healthcare personnel, person with chronic illness) may be vaccinated.

18. Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe?

Fiji will only procure and administer COVID-19 vaccines that have been recommended by the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization. The AstraZeneca vaccine is proven to be safe and effective, having undergone extremely strict safety checks and clinical trials.

19. What does safe mean?

What this means, is that extensive medical trials have been conducted to review all the side effects and medical conditions that people in the trials experienced.

The number of illnesses reported in the vaccinated group is compared with the control group to see whether the vaccine could be associated with an increase in any medical conditions. The rates of illness are also compared with the rate of those illnesses in the general population. For any severe illnesses reported, a specialist doctor involved in treating the person and an independent safety committee consider whether the illness could be associated with the vaccine.

All the information about adverse events (unexpected illnesses) reported during the trial has been provided to regulators, and the safety profile of both the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is similar to that of other vaccines.

20. How is the COVID-19 vaccine given?

The COVID-19 vaccine is injected into your upper arm.

21. Is the vaccine only available as an injection?

Yes, the approved vaccines are only given as two injections at the upper arm.

22. How many doses of the COVID-19 vaccine will I receive?

Each person will receive 2 doses of the vaccine, with the 2nd dose received 8-12 weeks after having the 1st dose.

23. Are there any side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

As with most vaccinations, it is normal for some people to experience mild side-effects. Most of the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are mild and should go away in a few days. The side-effects can include:

- headache;
- nausea;
- muscle/joint aches and pains;

- tenderness, swelling, warmth and/or itchiness at the injection site.
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- fever or chills.

A person can take paracetamol if needed to help address these side effects.

But if a person's symptoms persist, or they become worse, they should call the **158 toll free** line or visit their nearest health facility.

24. Should I take painkillers before the vaccination?

It is not currently recommended to take painkillers such as ibuprofen, aspirin or paracetamol **before** your COVID-19 vaccine to prevent side effects. However, if you do experience side effects such as fever, pain, or headaches after receiving the vaccine, you can take medicines containing paracetamol.

For those that take similar medications routinely, you should continue your medications as prescribed.

25. Are the vaccines Halal?

No pork or other animal derived ingredients are contained in the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine. The Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine has ethanol listed as an ingredient, but this is in amounts lower than found in natural foods.

26. Is the COVID-19 vaccine evil?

This claim has no scientific basis and is not based on fact. What we do know is that getting a COVID-19 vaccine can help protect you and those around you against the COVID-19 disease.

27. Why is it important to continue practicing the recommended public health measures?

It is important that we continue to follow the Government's recommended public health safety measures to keep our friends, family and community healthy and safe.

We must remember the following:

- i. Stay at home if feeling unwell
- ii. Regularly wash our hands with soap or use alcohol based sanitizer
- iii. Always cover our cough or sneeze in our elbow, or into a tissue and discard immediately
- iv. Practice physical distancing of at least 2-meters and,
- v. If recommended, wear a face mask to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

28. Who should I contact if I need more medical advice around COVID-19?

MoHMS number 3306177 or 158

Registering for your COVID-19 vaccination

A. Why do I have to register before I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

It is important to register for the vaccine because it will allow the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to determine when people will be able to receive their vaccine dose and that both doses are delivered on the proper timeline. We have a phased approach to vaccinating the community, which involves vaccinating health care and frontline workers, before moving to vaccinate the wider community.

This planning will help ensure that we vaccinate in a safe and efficient way.

B. Who can register to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

If you are 18 years and older, you are encouraged to register to receive your COVID-19 vaccine.

C. What documents do I need to register for the COVID-19?

Before you register, please ensure you have the following things with you:

- 1) **Your Birth Registration Number (BRN)** can be found at the top corner of your birth certificate or your **Citizenship Certificate Number** **without the year at the end.**
- 2) **A copy of an official ID** - this could be your passport, Voter's ID Card, FNPF Card, Driver's License, Student ID or TIN Joint Card.

If you do not have a birth certificate, you may use your Citizen Certificate Number. You can visit the health facility for further assistance with documentation or from a health mobile team around cities, towns, and in the communities.

D. Do I have to pay to get my Birth Registration Number if I do not have a birth certificate with me?

You do not have to pay for the Birth Certificate, you just need to turn up to a health facility to get your Birth Registration Number, if not visit the nearest Birth, Deaths and Marriages Office (BDM) or speak to someone at the mobile health team doing registration.

E. Where do I register for the COVID-19 vaccine?

For online registrations please use this link to register:

<https://vra.digitalfiji.gov.fj/>

F. If I have problems registering, who should I contact?

Should you have any issues with the registration process, please contact the toll free helpline 158.

You could also contact the ministry on:

Ministry of Health HEADQUARTERS Dinem House, 88 Amy Street, Toorak P.O Box 2223, Government Buildings, Suva	P: 330 6177
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G. I do not have a Birth Registration Number (BRN); can I still have the vaccine?

All Fiji citizens, over the age of 18, are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. If you have a copy of your Fijian Birth Certificate, you can find the BRN in the top corner of the certificate.

If you only have a Citizen Certificate, you may use this number to register for the vaccination.

H. I am a frontline worker, a work permit holder, but NOT a citizen. Can I still have the vaccine? If so, how do I register?

Yes you can have the vaccination, we will advise the public at large, as soon as we are ready to register all individuals with a permit holder.

Frontline Worker	employees within essential industries who must physically show up to their jobs. These can be people who work within the tourism sector at key points of entry, individuals that work at hospitals, and healthcare professionals.
Efficacy	Vaccine efficacy is the percentage reduction of disease in a

	vaccinated group of people compared to an unvaccinated group.
Effectiveness	Vaccine effectiveness refers to how well the vaccine performs, under real world conditions.
Side Effect	Any effect this is secondary to the intended effect of the vaccine.
Anti bodies	A protein used by the immune system to identify and neutralize foreign objects such as pathogenic bacteria and viruses.
Herd Immunity	Herd immunity is a form of indirect protection from infectious disease that can occur with some diseases when a sufficient percentage of a population has become immune to an infection. This can be through vaccinations.
COVAX	COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access, abbreviated as COVAX, is a global initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines led by UNICEF, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the World Health Organization, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, and others