



Dr Ben is Head of Health and Care with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). With this monthly fact sheet he will address some of the most common questions and rumours being asked by communities across Africa about the coronavirus, known as COVID-19. These questions and rumours are collected from communities by Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies working across Africa. This fact sheet aims to help National Societies respond to common questions and provide the facts behind the rumours and misinformation about the coronavirus.

## 1. Why do we need to continue following the preventative measures if we have taken the vaccine?

While the COVID-19 vaccines are very effective in preventing serious illness and death, we still don't know how effective they are at preventing asymptomatic infection, this is when the vaccinated person would not feel sick, but they could still spread the virus to others. Even with the COVID-19 vaccines now available to the public, society will not return to normal overnight. For communities to be protected, 60-80% of the population needs to be vaccinated, which can take time especially if there are many people who do not want to be vaccinated.

The more we allow the virus to spread, the more chances are that people will continue to get sick. To ensure this does not happen, for the time being, everyone, including those that have been vaccinated should continue to follow the preventative measures to help stop the spread of the virus. To protect ourselves and those close to us, follow these simple rules:

- Keep at least 1 meter from others
- Wear a mask, especially in crowded, closed and poorly ventilated settings.
- Clean your hands frequently
- Cover any cough or sneeze in your bent elbow
- When indoors with others, ensure good ventilation, such as by opening a window

## 2. How effective are the vaccines against Covid-19?

Vaccines save millions of lives each year. Vaccines work by training and preparing the body's natural defences to recognize and fight off the viruses and bacteria they target. After vaccination, if the body is later exposed to those disease-causing germs, the body is immediately ready to tackle them, preventing illness.

There are several safe and effective vaccines that prevent people from getting seriously ill or dying from COVID-19. This is one part of managing COVID-19, in addition to the main preventive measures.

As of 8 April 2021, the following vaccines against COVID-19 have been evaluated by WHO where each has met the necessary criteria for safety and efficacy. They are:

- AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine
- Johnson and Johnson/Janssen
- Moderna
- Pfizer/BioNTech

You should take whatever vaccine is made available to you first, even if you have already had COVID-19. It is important to be vaccinated as soon as possible once it's your turn and not wait. Approved COVID-19 vaccines provide a high degree of protection against getting seriously ill and dying from the disease, although no vaccine is 100% protective.

### THE 5 SIMPLE RULES TO KEEP YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY SAFE

1. Always wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer. Proper hand washing should take around 20 seconds and cover all parts of your hands – fingers, thumbs, between fingers, under nails, palms and the back of your hands. Sing the happy birthday song twice while you wash your hands to time 20 seconds. This will help kill any viruses that are on your hands and stop them getting into your body.
2. Don't touch your eyes, nose and mouth – this increases the chance of passing the virus from your hands into your body.
3. The virus spreads from person to person so try to limit your contact with other people. Stay home and avoid bars, restaurants and public events. If you do go out, try to keep a safe distance from others and wear a face mask. Imagine you are holding a big broom - you are a safe distance if you can't touch anyone with it. Avoid shaking hands, holding hands, cheek kisses or hugs.
4. If you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow – and wash your hands if you do cough or sneeze into your hands.
5. Stay at home if you feel unwell and have a dry cough and fever, or shortness of breath and contact your local health services or Ministry of Health hotline. This reduces the chance you might spread the virus to others

## 3. Can you die from taking the Covid-19 vaccine?

There have been no links found between getting the COVID-19 vaccine and death. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and getting vaccinated will help protect you against developing severe COVID-19 symptoms and dying.

Vaccines are designed to give you immunity without the dangers of getting the disease. It's common to experience some mild-to-moderate side effects when receiving vaccinations. This is because your immune system is instructing your body on how to react to the virus.

Mild-to-moderate side effects, like a low-grade fever or muscle aches, are normal and not a cause for alarm: they are signs that the body's immune system is responding to the vaccine, specifically the antigen (a substance that triggers an immune response) and is gearing up to fight the virus. These side effects usually go away on their own after a few days.

Common and mild or moderate side effects are a good thing: they show us that the vaccine is working. Experiencing no side effects doesn't mean the vaccine is ineffective. It means everybody responds differently.

Remember: vaccines are our critical allies in fighting the pandemic of COVID-19 worldwide.

### 4. What can we say to our family and friends who fear taking the vaccine?

Many of our family members, friends and neighbours may be scared or anxious about getting the COVID-19 vaccine. This is very normal; these are new vaccines that have been developed faster than any other vaccine in history. There has also been a lot of misinformation during the pandemic which can make people hesitant.

But like all vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccines went through multi-stage clinical trials, to make sure that they would be safe before they were available to the public. Even now with the roll out of the vaccines, they continue to be monitored for potential side effects. So we can say that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe, including for those with pre-existing conditions of any kind, such as auto-immune disorders like hypertension, diabetes, asthma, pulmonary, liver and kidney disease, as well as chronic infections that are stable and controlled.

When a person gets vaccinated against a disease, their risk of infection is also reduced – so they're also less likely to transmit the virus to others. As more people in a community get vaccinated, fewer people remain vulnerable, and there is less possibility for an infected person to pass the virus on to another person. Lowering the possibility for a virus to circulate in the community protects those who cannot be vaccinated (due to health conditions, like allergies, or their age) from the disease targeted by the vaccine.

Two key reasons to get vaccinated are to protect ourselves and to protect those around us. Because not everyone can be vaccinated – including very young babies, those who are seriously ill or have certain allergies – they depend on others being vaccinated to ensure they are also safe from vaccine-preventable diseases.

For some tips on how we can talk to our family and friends, see this [factsheet](#).