FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON COVID-19 VACCINES

1. What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

It is a vaccine to protect against the COVID-19 virus, also known as SARS CoV-2 which causes the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

2. Why is it important to be vaccinated?

The SARS CoV-2 is a new type of coronavirus that is easily spread by infected droplets in the air through close personal contact, coughing and sneezing. In most cases it is a mild illness but for some people it can cause serious health complications or death.

Vaccines work by training and preparing the body's natural defenses – the immune system – to recognize and fight off the viruses and bacteria they target. If the body is exposed to those disease-causing germs later, it is immediately ready to destroy them, preventing illness. It is important to vaccinate because with effective vaccines, we strengthen our immunity and eventually control and stop transmission of the virus and protect our communities. There are no shortcuts out of this pandemic and we will be living in the "new normal" for the foreseeable future.

The COVID-19 vaccination program that will be introduced in Brunei Darussalam can help protect yourself and the people around you. Especially individuals at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine may also help keep you from getting seriously ill, should you get infected with COVID-19.

3. How safe is this vaccine?

Scientists are currently working hard to develop safe and effective vaccines to protect people against COVID-19. There are several vaccines that are currently developed and some have been approved by regulatory authorities, while others are waiting approval.

The World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and its partners are committed to accelerating the development of the COVID-19 vaccines while maintaining the highest standards of safety and quality. The COVID-19 vaccines will only be available for use in the country after they have been approved by the medicines regulatory authority.

When the vaccines are rolled out, they will continue to be monitored closely, as is the case with all other new and routine vaccines. Any side effects (adverse events) following immunization will be closely monitored, studied and followed up, as is the case with any new vaccine.

4. Does everyone need to be vaccinated?

The more people get vaccinated, the closer we get to reaching immunization coverage that provides **herd immunity**. This lowers the overall amount of virus able to spread within the population and helps ensure vulnerable groups who cannot get vaccinated are kept safe.

The COVID-19 vaccines will be in short supply for many months to come. At least during 2021 and many countries will not have enough vaccines available to them to vaccinate their entire population. It is important to ensure that those who are most at risk receive the vaccines first. This will involve looking at factors such as who is most exposed to COVID-19 and who can become seriously ill or die from it.

5. Is this vaccine suitable for everyone?

The vaccine is approved for use for individuals aged 18 and above.

Precaution:

Please discuss with your doctors / obstetrician / general practitioner before getting vaccinated if:

- You are pregnant
- You have ever had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) after any other vaccine injection

Inform health staff before you are vaccinated if you have ever had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) before. If you do have a reaction to the vaccine, it usually happens in several minutes. Healthcare staff giving the vaccine are trained to deal with allergic reactions and treat them immediately.

6. Will the COVID-19 vaccines be effective?

There are several factors that impact a vaccine's effectiveness, such as the person's age, underlying conditions, or previous exposure to the disease. The vaccine's own characteristics – its composition, mode of delivery, types of vaccines, among others – also determine its effectiveness.

Even with existing vaccines, there is always a small percentage of people who are not protected after vaccination, while for others, the protection may diminish over time. Some vaccines require boosters to maintain sufficient protection against the disease.

As long as the virus is circulating anywhere, all countries remain at risk. Even with an effective vaccine, it will take time before enough people get the vaccine to build herd immunity. This means that for some time and even as vaccines start to be rolled-out, we still need to continue with the preventative health measures that work - physical distancing, wearing masks, frequent hand-washing and practicing proper cough and sneeze etiquette.

7. COVID-19 vaccines are being developed quickly, are they skipping the necessary steps to ensure the vaccines are safe?

In the past, vaccines have been developed through a series of steps that can take many years. Now, given the urgent need for a COVID-19 vaccine, unprecedented financial investments and scientific collaboration are changing how vaccines are developed. No steps in the normal process are being skipped but some steps in the research and development process are happening in parallel, while still maintaining strict clinical and safety standards.

Clinical trials

Clinical trials assess vaccines in people to see if they work to prevent COVID-19 and are safe. Clinical trials have three parts, called phases.

If the clinical trials show the vaccine is safe, the medicines regulatory authority will further assess the safety information. They also check the way vaccines were developed in the laboratory. The medicines regulatory authority is independent, which means they are separate from the researchers who developed the vaccine, and from the manufacturers who make the vaccine.

- **Phase 1**: The vaccine is given to a small number of people.
- **Phase 2**: The vaccine is given to hundreds of people.
- **Phase 3**: The vaccine is given to many thousands of people. Researchers are able to observe potential reactions by including lots of people in clinical trials.

If the clinical trials show the vaccine is safe, the medicines regulatory authority will further assess the safety information. They will also check the way the vaccines are developed in the laboratory. The medicines regulatory authority is independent, which means they are separate from the researchers who developed the vaccine, and from the manufacturers who make the vaccine.

If the medicines regulatory authority agrees the vaccine is safe, the manufacturer can start supplying doses of the vaccine for those who need it. The medicines regulatory authority and manufacturers continue to monitor the safety of the vaccine when people are being vaccinated in the community.

All these steps have been and will be followed for the development of COVID-19 vaccines to make sure they are safe. It might look like shortcuts are being taken, but this is not so, these steps are just happening faster than usual. People are joining the clinical trials more quickly than usual and funding and approval steps have been fast-tracked. Also, researchers; manufacturers and medicines regulatory authority are working together to check vaccine safety information from clinical trials more rapidly than usual.

8. When will the vaccine be available?

Vaccines will arrive in Brunei Darussalam in batches over several months. Hence not everyone can be vaccinated immediately. Healthcare workers and vulnerable individuals including elderly and those with chronic underlying conditions are among those prioritized during the first phase.

As additional vaccines are approved and vaccine supplies increase, the COVID-19 vaccine will be made available for everyone.

9. What are the different types of COVID-19 vaccines under development?

There are multiple different types of vaccines currently in clinical trials against the coronavirus. While all vaccines aim to expose the body to an antigen that will not cause disease but will provoke an immune response that can block or kill the virus if a person becomes infected, various vaccine candidates use different technology platforms. These differences result in different vaccine characteristics, including the strength of the immune response, number of doses required, safety profiles, cold chain storage requirements, and manufacturing time.

Type of vaccine	Description	Example of Existing Vaccines
Inactivated virus vaccines	An inactivated version of the target pathogen (disease causing organism) or a part of pathogen. The antigen is detected by immune cells, but unable to cause disease.	Sinovac Sinopharm Covaxin
Viral-vector vaccines (non-replicating)	A virus is genetically engineered to contain a specific gene to produce antigens from the target pathogen. When the nucleic acid is inserted into human cells, they produce copies of the virus' protein, which stimulate a protective response from the host immune system.	AstraZeneca Sputnik V Janssen

Type of vaccine	Description	Example of Existing Vaccines
Ribonucleic-acid (RNA) vaccines *(New technology)*	RNA vaccines include gene to produce a target pathogen protein that prompts an immune response.	Moderna Pfizer/BioNTech
Protein subunit vaccines	These vaccines use fragments of the target pathogen that is important for immunity.	Novavax Sanofi + GSK

WHO regularly updates analysis of COVID-19 vaccines in clinical development that can be found here: **https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/draft-landscape-of-covid-19-candidate-vaccines**.

10. Where can I get the vaccine?

The vaccination centres are:

Brunei Muara	:	Indoor Stadium
Tutong	:	Pengiran Muda Mahkota Pengiran Muda Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah Hospital,Tutong
Kuala Belait	:	Suri Seri Begawan Hospital
Temburong	:	Pengiran Isteri Hajjah Mariam Hospital

The first dose of vaccination appointment can be pre-booked through the BruHealth app. The second dose vaccination appointment will be given through Bru-HIMS by staffs on the day of first dose vaccination and reminders will be given through the BruHealth app.

11. How will the vaccine be administered?

The COVID-19 vaccine is administered by intramuscular injection into your upper arm.

It is given in 1 or 2 doses, anywhere between 2 to 12 weeks apart (depending on the type of vaccine).

12. Why do I need two doses / shots for the COVID-19 vaccine?

Currently authorized vaccines, and most vaccines under development, require two doses of vaccine. The first shot helps the immune system recognize the virus, and the second shot strengthens the immune response. You need both to get the best protection.

13. What are the possible side effects of the COVID19 vaccine?

Any vaccine or medication can cause side effects. Many vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccines may have a series of mild and short-term effects such as:

- pain at the injection site
- fatigue
- muscle ache
- low-grade fever
- a headache
- mild flu-like symptoms

You can take painkillers, such as paracetamol, if you need to.

If your symptoms get worse or you are worried, please seek medical advice immediately.

14. What should you do if you experience any of these side effects?

If you experience any of the above side effects or are concerned about any health problems which you think may be related, please seek medical advice at your nearest healthcare facility immediately or call Health Advice Line 148. You are required to complete the side effect reporting form after seven (7) days from receiving the vaccine in the BruHealth app.

When you seek advice from a doctor or nurse, make sure you inform them about your vaccination (please show them your vaccination booklet or booking on the BruHealth app if available) so that they can assess you properly.

15. Am I fully protected against COVID-19 after being vaccinated?

Vaccinated individuals can still be carriers and can transmit the virus or infection. Individuals must continue taking steps to protect themselves and others. This includes frequent hand washing, mask wearing and physical distancing, as well as adherence to national and local rules on contact-tracing, quarantining and other public health measures. Your body will also require time to form immunity after the first and second dose.

It is too early to know if the COVID-19 vaccines will provide long-term protection against the virus. We must continue using all the other tools and preventive measures to fight against COVID-19.

16. I already had COVID-19, so do I need to get the vaccine?

Yes. Even if you have already had COVID-19, you could still get it again. That's because experts do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Even if you have already recovered from COVID-19, it is possible – although rare – that you could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 again. Even if you do get COVID-19 again, the vaccine can reduce the seriousness of your symptoms.

17. I have COVID-19 now, should I get the vaccine?

No. You should delay getting vaccinated until you recover from COVID-19.

Do this for:

- at least four weeks after you first notice symptoms or
- four weeks since you tested positive for COVID-19

18. Can a COVID-19 vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. A COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19.

There are several different types of vaccines in development. All of them teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. Sometimes this process can cause symptoms, such as fever. These symptoms are normal and are a sign that the body is building protection against the virus that causes COVID-19.

It typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination. That means it's possible you could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination and get sick. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection.

19. Can my child get vaccinated for COVID-19?

No. More studies need to be conducted before COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for children under 18 years of age.

20. Is it safe to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I have an underlying medical condition?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccination is especially important for individuals with underlying health problems like heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, and obesity. People with these conditions are more likely to get very sick from COVID-19.

References:

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