



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS) COVID-19 VACCINATION ROLL-OUT IN SIERRA LEONE

VERSION 2 – 24TH MARCH, 2021

NOTE: This document may be updated as the situation changes. Please check you are referring to the latest version. All versions will be shared on the *Corona Fet Na We All Fet* Facebook Page.

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COVID-19 VACCINES – SAFETY & EFFICACY

1. What are COVID-19 vaccines?

COVID-19 vaccines are vaccines which prevent you from getting seriously sick or dying from COVID-19.

2. Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Yes, there are strict measures in place to make sure that COVID-19 vaccines are safe before they are rolled-out. Like all vaccines, COVID-19 vaccines have to go through many levels of testing before they are approved, including large trials that involve tens of thousands of people. During these trials, safety concerns and common side effects are identified. Once the trials show that a COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective, the trial data is further reviewed by independent experts in the country where the vaccine was made, and then by experts in the country where the vaccine is going to be used. The Sierra Leone authorities have carefully reviewed all available trial data for the COVID-19 vaccines to be used in Sierra Leone and deemed the vaccines to be safe and effective. Millions of people have already received COVID-19 vaccines worldwide.

3. Normally it takes years and years to develop new vaccines, but COVID-19 vaccines have been developed in less than 18 months, does this mean they are less safe?

No. Because of the urgent global need to develop COVID-19 vaccines to stop the COVID-19 pandemic, the vaccine process was fast-tracked, but no stages of the process were skipped. Normally, during the vaccine development process there are pauses between stages to secure funding – these pauses were shortened or completely removed during the COVID-19 vaccine development process. Also, some stages were carried out at the same time as each other to speed up the process whenever it was safe to do so. As a result, COVID-19 vaccines have been developed more quickly than other vaccines but have still been proven to be safe and effective.

4. I have heard that some people have died after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, is this true?

Millions of people have received COVID-19 vaccines worldwide. Deaths from other causes will continue to occur, including after vaccination, but this does not mean the vaccination caused the death. As of the 9th March, 2021 over 268 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been given to people all over the world and not one death has been found to have been caused by a COVID-19 vaccine.

5. How can I trust that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

Millions of people have already received the COVID-19 vaccines worldwide. In Sierra Leone, the President himself has taken the COVID-19 vaccine as well as Government Ministers, the NaCOVERC Coordinator and Spokesman, and the Mayor of Freetown.

COVID-19 VACCINES – DIFFERENT TYPES AVAILABLE

6. Why are different countries using different COVID-19 vaccines?

There are many different COVID-19 vaccines being developed by scientists. They all work to prevent you from getting seriously sick or dying from COVID-19 but there are differences between them. Some need to be kept at very cold temperatures in specialized freezers right up until when they are given to you, some can't be given to people over a certain age, and some are given to you in two doses with a gap in-between while others are given to you in just one dose. Different countries are using different vaccines depending on availability and access, whether they plan to store them in specialized freezers or in a normal vaccine fridge, and the age of the people they are giving them to. Whichever COVID-19 vaccine is used, all COVID-19 vaccines have been proven to be safe and effective.

7. Which COVID-19 vaccines are available in Sierra Leone?

Sierra Leone currently has two different types of COVID-19 vaccines in country, 200,000 doses of **Sinopharm** from China, 96,000 doses of **AstraZeneca-Oxford** from the COVAX Facility (a global partnership between the Government of Sierra Leone, Gavi, CEPI, WHO and UNICEF), and 42,000 doses of **AstraZeneca-Oxford** from the African Union Commission through the Africa Centres for Disease Control. Both Sinopharm and AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccines are two-dose vaccines which can be stored in normal vaccine fridges, but they have different maximum age ranges. Both of these vaccines are safe and effective and have already been given to millions of people worldwide. More COVID-19 vaccines are expected in Sierra Leone over the coming weeks.

8. I have heard that the AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccine can cause blood clots, is this true?

A few countries paused the roll-out of AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccine after reports of people who had been vaccinated developing blood clots. This was done as a precautionary measure so that the reports could be fully investigated. However, EU authorities have said there is no indication that it is the vaccine that is causing blood clots and WHO do not advise that vaccine roll-out be paused. None of the AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccines in Sierra Leone have come from the same batch as the vaccines which are being investigated in Europe.

COVID-19 VACCINES – HOW THEY WORK & WHO CAN TAKE THEM

9. How do COVID-19 vaccines work?

Most vaccines contain the same germs, or *part* of the germs, that cause disease. For example, the measles vaccine contains the measles virus and the polio vaccine contains the polio virus. But the germs in vaccines have been either killed or weakened so that they can't make you sick. When you receive the vaccine your body produces antibodies to fight the germ, just like it would if you got the actual disease. These antibodies mean that if you are exposed to the disease in the future, your body will respond quickly and efficiently to fight it, and you will be much less likely to get seriously sick or die. COVID-19 vaccines work like this, they cause your body to produce antibodies which protect you from COVID-19.

10. Will the COVID-19 vaccines protect against COVID-19 variants that are emerging in different countries?

COVID-19 variants (a changed or mutated version of the original COVID-19 virus) have emerged in South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Brazil. It is very normal for a virus to change like this. Because the variants are new scientists are still studying them to understand how common they are, how they will affect people, and how well the currently available COVID-19 vaccines will work against them. However, it is thought that the currently available COVID-19 vaccines will still give your body some protection against COVID-19 variants even if it is slightly lessened. As more is learnt about the variants, vaccines can be adapted to increase the protection they give against them.

11. Can anyone take the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccines are safe for most adults. However, due to the limited availability of COVID-19 vaccines, most countries, including Sierra Leone, are prioritising those most at risk from COVID-19. The priority groups and eligibility criteria for receiving a COVID-19 vaccine in Sierra Leone are listed under Questions 18 and 19.

12. Why aren't children be given the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccines have not been tested in children under the age of 16 and so cannot be approved for this age group.

13. I have had COVID-19, can I take the COVID-19 vaccine?

It is safe for people who have had COVID-19 to take the COVID-19 vaccine. However, if you have had COVID-19 in the past six months it is very likely that you still have antibodies to fight the disease. Because of this and the limited availability of COVID-19 vaccines in Sierra Leone, you will not be given the COVID-19 vaccine if you had COVID-19 in the last six months (even if you are in a priority group). This is so that limited vaccines can be saved for those in the priority groups who do not have any antibodies to fight the disease.

14. Can COVID-19 vaccines cause side-effects?

Yes, some people don't experience any side-effects but others experience some minor side-effects. Any vaccine can cause side-effects, they are a normal sign that your body is building protection against disease. See Question 28 for side-effects to expect.

15. Can COVID-19 vaccines make someone sick with COVID-19?

No, none of the authorized and recommended COVID-19 vaccines or either of the COVID-19 vaccines in Sierra Leone can make you sick with COVID-19.

16. Will I be protected from COVID-19 as soon as I have had my COVID-19 vaccine?

No, it can take up to two weeks for your body to produce antibodies which protect you from COVID-19. If you are taking a two-dose vaccine you need to wait for two weeks after the *second*-dose of the vaccine until you can expect to be protected. Before this time you can still get seriously sick from COVID-19 or even die if exposed to the disease, because your body has not had enough time to build protection.

17. How long does vaccine protection from COVID-19 last?

Because COVID-19 vaccines have only been developed recently, it is too early to know how long the protection they give will last. Research is ongoing to answer this question in the future.

ELIGIBILITY FOR COVID-19 VACCINATION IN SIERRA LEONE

18. Who are the priority groups for COVID-19 vaccination in Sierra Leone?

- People over 70 years old
- Healthcare workers of any age
- Social workers over 40 years old
- Teachers and lecturers over 40 years old
- Military personnel over 40 years old
- Police personnel over 40 years old
- Customs and immigration workers including port and airport staff over 40 years old
- Prison officers over 40 years old
- Fire force officers over 40 years old
- Political leaders over 40 years old

19. Who is eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in Sierra Leone?

Anyone who belongs to at least one of the priority groups (see Question 18) and who:

- Is over 18
- Is not pregnant
- Has not had COVID-19 in the last six months

- Has never have had severe allergic reaction to any of the ingredients in the COVID-19 vaccine before.

20. Is the COVID-19 vaccine free in Sierra Leone?

Yes.

21. I am eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine but have HIV / an auto-immune condition / am immunocompromised, can I still receive it?

If you are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine but have HIV or an auto-immune condition or are immunocompromised, you may still be able to receive it. You should present yourself for vaccination (see Question 22) and explain your situation. A healthcare worker will offer you information and counselling so you can discuss and agree together whether vaccination is right for you.

22. I am eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, when and where do I go to receive it?

The currently available COVID-19 vaccines will be administered to eligible persons between Monday 22nd March, 2021 and Wednesday 31st March, 2021. If you are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine you should go to one of the following COVID-19 vaccination centres on any day during this period, during working hours, to receive the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

DISTRICT	COVID-19 VACCINATION CENTRE
Bombali	Makeni Government Hospital
	Kamabai CHC
Bonthe	Bonthe Government Hospital
	UBC Hospital Matru
Falaba	Mongo CHC
	Falaba CHC
Bo	Bo Government Hospital
	Koribondo CHC
Kailahun	Kailahun Government Hospital
	Nixon Segbwema
Kenema	Kenema Government Hospital
	Panguma Hospital
Kono	Koidi Government Hospital
	UMC Jiamas Swafe
Kambia	Kambia Government Hospital
	Madina CHC
Koinadugu	Kabala Government Hospital
	Alkalia CHC
Karene	Kamakwie Hospital
	Gbinty CHC
Port Loko	Port Loko Government Hospital
	Lungi Hospital
Pujehun	Pujehun Government Hospital
	Zimmi CHC
Moyamba	Moyamba Government Hospital
	Njala University
Tonkolili	Magburaka Government Hospital
	Mile 91 CHC
Western Rural	Waterloo CHC
	Goderich CHC
Western Urban	Lumley Hospital
	Rokupa Government Hospital
	Kinghamman Road Hospital
	Macauley Street Hospital

After you have received your first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, the healthcare worker will tell you when to return for your second dose.

23. I am not eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine but I want to have it, what do I do?

If you are not eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine you will not be able to have it at this time in Sierra Leone. This is to preserve the limited supply for those most at risk from COVID-19.

24. Can I choose which COVID-19 vaccine I am given?

No, vaccination teams will choose the most appropriate vaccine for you, based on availability, and your age.

25. Can I refuse the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, COVID-19 vaccinations are not mandatory. Even if you are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine you can still choose not to have it.

GETTING YOUR COVID-19 VACCINE IN SIERRA LEONE

26. What should I take with me when I go for the COVID-19 vaccine?

If you have a valid national ID card or other form of ID you should take this with you, but if you don't it does not matter – you can go without ID.

27. What will happen when I go for the COVID-19 vaccine?

1. When you first enter the vaccination centre someone from the vaccination team will explain to you the process and you will wait in the waiting room until it is your turn to be screened.
2. Next, members of the vaccination team will:
 - Ask you some questions so they can check that you are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine and register you on the system (if you are not eligible you will leave after this)
 - Explain how the COVID-19 vaccine protects you from COVID-19
 - Check that you understand and consent to be given the COVID-19 vaccine
 - Inject the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine into your upper arm
 - Observe you for 15-30 minutes to check that you don't have any allergic reactions
 - Tell you when to return for your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine
 - Give you your COVID-19 vaccination card.

28. Will the COVID-19 vaccine give me any side-effects?

You may experience some mild side-effects such as pain, redness and swelling where you were injected, and tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever or nausea in the rest of your body. These are a normal sign that your body is building protection against the disease and should go away in a few days.

29. How can I manage mild side-effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

To help manage mild side-effects from the COVID-19 vaccine you can:

- (For pain where you were injected) Press clean, cool, wet cloth on your arm and move your arm around to reduce swelling
- (For general body pain and fever) Drink lots of water, rest, wear light, cool clothes.

30. What should I do if I feel sick or I am worried I am having an adverse reaction after getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

If you feel sick after getting the COVID-19 vaccine (beyond normal mild side-effects mentioned in Question 28), or if the side-effects have not gone away after three days, you should contact your nearest healthcare worker. If it is serious sickness or an emergency, as always, seek medical assistance immediately.

31. Will I still be fully protected from COVID-19 if I only take one dose (of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine)?

No, if you have only taken one dose (of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine) your body will have built *some* protection against the disease but not all, and the protection it has built may not last long. The second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine strengthens and completes the protection and your body's ability to fight the disease long term.

32. When do I go back for the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine?

After receiving the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, someone from the vaccination team will advise you of when you need to return for your second dose. This could be between three and twelve weeks, depending on which COVID-19 vaccine you were given and available appointments.

33. I have had my first dose, can I get my second dose at a different vaccination centre/in a different district?

Yes, you don't have to have your second dose at the same place where you got your first dose. You can go to any of the vaccination centres (see Question 22 for list of vaccination centres) in any of the districts for your second dose.

34. I missed my COVID-19 vaccination appointment for the second dose, what do I do?

You should go back for your second dose on the date specified, this is the correct time to receive the second dose. If you miss your second dose appointment a healthcare worker will contact you to make arrangements.

35. Do I still need to wear a face mask and follow other preventive measures once I have been vaccinated?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccine prevents *you* from getting seriously sick or dying from COVID-19, but it is not yet known if vaccinated people can still be infected with the disease and spread it to others, without knowing it. This means that until we learn more, vaccinated people should continue to wear a face mask and follow other preventive measures to protect those who haven't been vaccinated.

FURTHER INFORMATION

36. Where can I get more information?

For more information:

- Talk to a healthcare worker
- Call 117 free from all networks
- Visit the following social media pages:
 - o *Corona Fet Na We All Fet* facebook page
 - o <https://mic.gov.sl/> website
 - o <https://dhse.gov.sl/> website