A Family Guide to the Coronavirus (COVID-19)
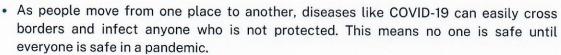

Photo Credit: Vatican News

"I believe that morally everyone must take the vaccine. It is the moral choice because it is about your life but also the lives of others."

- Pope Francis, January 2021

This guide is designed to answer questions you and your family may have about the COVID-19 vaccines. Information on vaccines is based on the latest scientific research. It will be updated as new information becomes available. For more information about COVID-19 vaccines, please speak with your local doctor or health worker.

Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

- We should get vaccinated to protect ourselves and to protect those around us. Without vaccines, we—along with our friends, families, co-workers and neighbours—are at risk of serious illness from COVID-19. Receiving the vaccine is an act of love toward the other members of our community and part of our moral responsibility for the common good.
- As people move from one place to another, diseases like COVID-19 can easily cross borders and infect anyone who is not protected. This means no one is safe until everyone is safe in a pandemic.
- A pandemic disrupts social and family life. In order to protect people, countries have taken extreme measures like nationwide lockdowns that have had serious socio-economic, political, ecological and psychological implications. Vaccines can do a great deal of good to stop the spread of the virus and prepare the ground for physical and socio-political healing. Therefore, receiving the vaccine, once it is available, can be considered an act of social love.

Photos Courtesy of Vatican COVID-19 Commission

Are COVID-19 vaccines safe and what is in them?

- Even though COVID-19 vaccines are being developed as rapidly as possible, vaccines will not be approved by regulatory agencies or introduced in countries in the general population until their effectiveness and safety have been demonstrated. Even after COVID-19 vaccines are approved, monitoring for safety and effectiveness continues.
- All of the ingredients in vaccines—as well as the vaccines themselves—are thoroughly tested and monitored to ensure they, and the quantities in which they are used, are safe. Vaccine ingredients listed on labels can look unfamiliar, but we naturally have many of them in the body and in the environment.

Are there side effects of COVID-19 vaccines?

- You may have some side effects, which are normal signs that your body is building protection. A mild fever or soreness or redness in the arm is common. But these mild reactions go away within a few days on their own. There have been some reports of mild allergic reactions to specific COVID-19 vaccines. Your healthcare worker can give you more information if you experience such symptoms.

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COVID - 19
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How are COVID-19 vaccines developed and tested?

- Before a vaccine can be introduced in a country, it must go through extensive and rigorous testing and be proven to be safe and effective across a broad population. A COVID-19 vaccine is first tested in animals to make sure that it is safe for humans to use and to see if it is likely to work against the disease. It is then tested in a large sample of humans before it is approved and made widely available.
- Each country has regulatory bodies that oversee vaccine safety and efficacy before they are used widely. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) coordinates a number of independent technical bodies that review the safety of vaccines prior to and even after they have been introduced. Vaccines that are approved for use by WHO have gone through rigorous tests and clinical trials to show that they are safe and effective.

Will I be protected as soon as I have had a COVID-19 vaccine?

- It typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity (protection against the virus that causes COVID-19) after vaccination. Some vaccines require individuals to receive two shots. Some require only one shot. For those that require a second dose, maximum protection won't start until a couple of weeks after your second dose. It's important to remember, however, that no vaccine provides 100% protection.

Will I still need to follow physical distancing if I have a COVID-19 vaccine?

- Even after you get your vaccine, you should continue to wear a mask, wash your hands regularly and keep your distance from others for as long as your government or local authorities recommend. While vaccines can protect you from severe forms of COVID-19, we still do not know yet how effective they will be at preventing transmission. Continued physical distancing and hygiene measures give you and others the best protection from catching and spreading the virus.

Will COVID-19 vaccines provide long-term protection?

- Both this disease and the vaccine are new. We don't know how long protection lasts for those who get infected or those who are vaccinated. As vaccines are rolled out globally and studies continue, we will be able to learn more about how long this protection lasts.

Will other vaccines help protect me against COVID-19?

- Currently, there is no evidence that existing vaccines or treatments for other diseases will protect against COVID-19. To be protected, you need to get one of the authorised COVID-19 vaccines and continue practicing physical distancing and hygiene measures.
- Vaccines are one of the most effective tools to help stop the pandemic. Vaccines will work with your immune system so it will be ready to fight the virus as soon as possible if you are exposed.

What COVID-19 vaccines are currently available?

- The scientific and vaccine manufacturing communities around the world have been working faster than ever to develop and produce vaccines that can protect people against COVID-19 and help end this crisis. Since the emergence of this new coronavirus several vaccines have been approved and started to be rolled out. Most countries have their own national regulatory authority that decides whether a vaccine is appropriate for use in their territory. Check with your country's health department to find out which vaccines are approved, and which are available for use in your country. Some international institutions, such as the WHO, and academic institutions, such as McGill University, have created instruments to track vaccine developments and approvals.

Photos Courtesy of Vatican COVID-19 Commission

WEAR A MASK

PRACTICE PHYSICAL DISTANCING

WASH HANDS OFTEN

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