

THE IMPORTANCE OF VACCINATION



To support the operational effectiveness of the RAF and ensure a smooth training pipeline, that gets personnel to the front-line as quickly as possible, the RAF are strongly encouraging its personnel to get vaccinated. Both Phase 1 organisations units have put in place several mitigations to keep its trainees safe and ensure smooth progression in their journey through Phase 1 and Phase 2 training. Vaccinations are a key component in our strategy.

TRAINING

Whilst undertaking Phase 1 training both Recruit Training Squadron and RAF Officer Training Academy have adopted a 'Cohort' approach to training to ensure effective mitigation against the spread of COVID-19 across intakes. However, infrastructure limitations at both organisations dictate that cohorts are treated as close contacts. Therefore, in the event of a positive COVID-19 amongst the cohort, trainees will be required to isolate for 10 days. However, from 16 Aug 21, only those who have **not been** double vaccinated will be required to isolate.

Trainees who are required to isolate will be removed from their intake for the period of isolation and, providing there is sufficient capacity, the trainee will be loaded onto a later course to continue with their training. For Recruit Training Squadron this could result in at least a 2-week delay and for RAF Officer Training Academy this could result in a delay of at least 6 weeks. Any delays in completing Phase 1 training will have an impact on pay, seniority and could also delay the start date of Phase 2 training.

MEDICAL

Why should I bother getting vaccinated?

Vaccines teach your immune system how to protect you from diseases. It's much safer for your immune system to learn this through vaccination against COVID than by catching the disease and hoping to recover. All the emerging evidence suggests that the vaccines prevent severe disease, hospitalisation, and death. It's not just a question of surviving. For every person that dies, there are many others who live through COVID but require intensive medical care and may suffer long-lasting health effects. Although many personnel in the Armed Forces are below the age of 50 and generally fit and well, this does not guarantee a mild case of COVID or an uneventful recovery. Although many people experience mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, just over one in every 100 of Armed Forces personnel who contracts COVID needs admitting to hospital. A wider study of hospital admissions looking at over 5000 cases identified that patients aged between 16 and 50 accounted for:

- 10% of inpatients
- 1% of deaths
- 20% needed critical care
- 10% still in hospital
- 40% required significant Oxygen
- 3% needed invasive mechanical ventilation

It is recognised that whilst most people get better within a matter of weeks following infection with COVID, there are a group of people who suffer with post-COVID conditions, sometimes referred to as Long COVID. This presents as a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health symptoms that are experienced four or more weeks after being first infected with COVID. Long COVID can affect people who did not experience any symptoms in the days or weeks after they were infected and for some this can have a big impact on quality of life. A keyway to protect against Long COVID is through getting a vaccination as soon as this is offered. The long-term response to the pandemic requires a safe and effective vaccine to be available for all who need it. It's a way to keep you, your friends and family safe and is key to lifting of restrictions.

The vaccines were developed so quickly – are they safe?

Yes, they are, but like all other medication or vaccines they have a side effect profile The COVID vaccines have been developed through global collaboration and with extensive input of funding from any nations. It is important to note that no steps have been skipped during their development – they have undergone the same trials and evaluation as any other vaccines but in a very concentrated way. The evidence has been scrutinized by the MHRA and so far over 35 million doses have been administered in the UK with most people experiencing only mild post vaccination symptoms such as a sore arm, achey joints or flu like symptoms.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Patient information leaflets have been produced for the Pfizer/BioNTech , Oxford AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines which list the side effects, cautions and contraindications to the vaccines. Safety data recently published shows that the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford AstraZeneca vaccines have a similar side effect profile to other vaccines, with a rate of approximately 3 per 1000 doses. Common symptoms are short lived and resolve within a few days and include a sore arm, fatigue and flu-like symptoms