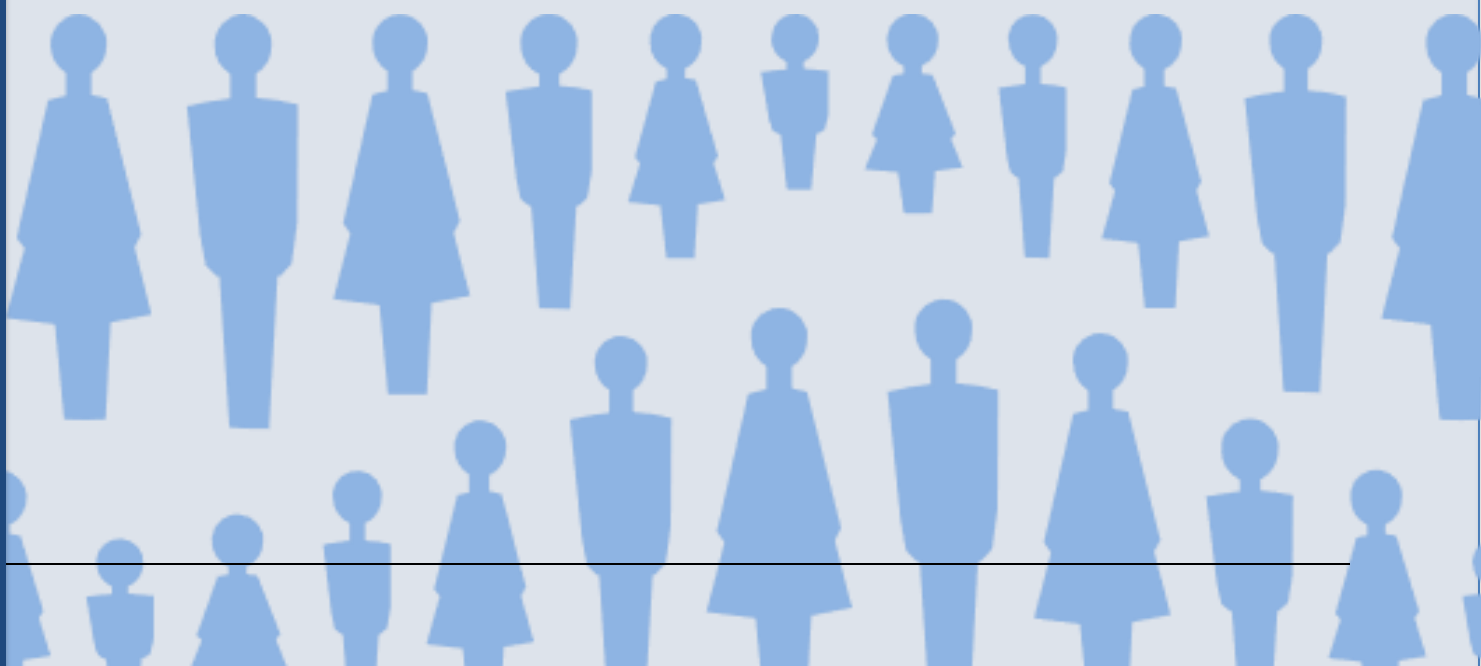
World Health Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR Europe

A QUICK GUIDE

Vaccination against COVID-19 with the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine

This quick guide offers basic information about COVID-19, the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine and what to expect following vaccination



1. WHAT IS COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infection caused by a type of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), which affects the lungs, airways and sometimes other parts of the body. COVID-19 can cause mild to serious illness and in severe cases death may occur.

The most common signs and symptoms include:

- fever (high temperature of 38 °C or above)
- cough
- tiredness
- difficulty breathing
- loss of smell or taste.

COVID-19 is highly infectious. It spreads through droplets produced when people cough or sneeze, or indirectly by way of surfaces where the droplets have landed. In addition to vaccination, recommended prevention measures include washing hands regularly, wearing a mask and physical distancing.

2. WHO IS MOST AT RISK FROM COVID-19?

Everyone is at risk for COVID-19 infection.

But some people are at higher **risk of becoming severely ill** with the virus, meaning they may need to seek hospital care or may require intensive care or oxygen to help them breathe due to the severity of the disease.

Older adults (aged 60 and above) and people with certain health conditions are at higher risk of developing more severe disease if they get infected with the COVID-19 virus. Inequality in access to healthcare may also place some people at higher risk of severe COVID_19 outcomes.

Other people are at increased **risk of becoming infected** with the virus, including health workers, as they come in close contact with many patients who could potentially be infected, or they provide direct care for those who are sick with COVID-19. Health workers are furthermore at high risk of passing the virus on to their patients.

Residents of long-term care facilities are also at high risk of infection because the virus may spread quickly among people who live and gather together. Other social, demographic and occupational factors may also affect the risk of exposure to COVID-19 disease, because keeping physical distance from others is difficult in some work or living conditions.

To make the greatest possible impact on those at higher risk of becoming severely ill with or dying from the virus and for those at increased risk of becoming infected, the high-risk groups mentioned above need to get the vaccine first while supply of vaccines is still limited.

3. WHY GET VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19?

Vaccination against COVID-19 is important, because it:

- will protect you from getting seriously ill from COVID-19 and greatly reduce the risk of getting infected;
- will help combat the pandemic by reducing the number of people hospitalized and the number of people dying from COVID-19;
- will help authorities maintain the most essential services, including health care.

4. HOW IS THE VACCINE GIVEN?

The vaccine is given as an injection in the muscle of your upper arm.

5. HOW DOES THE SINOVAC-CORONAVAC COVID-19 VACCINE WORK?

Vaccines help develop immunity by imitating an infection. The Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine offers protection against COVID-19. It activates the body's natural defense (immune system), including the production of antibodies against the virus, so it can be ready to fight the virus and protect you from the disease if you are exposed to it in the future.

The Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine uses an inactivated, no longer infectious form of the COVID-19 virus (SARS-CoV-2). The used COVID-19 virus is inactivated by a chemical that destroys the genetic material of the virus but leaves many proteins of the virus. The immune system reacts to these proteins and builds antibodies against the virus. With these antibodies your body can respond faster and stronger when it is faced with the actual COVID-19 virus in the future.

The response of the immune system to inactivated virus, such as the inactivated virus in Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine, is normally weaker and does not last that long. To overcome this problem, the vaccines contains an adjuvant (booster) to boost our immune systems. This adjuvant is made from aluminium-hydroxide and is used in many other childhood and adult vaccines currently available.

Technology using inactivated vaccines containing adjuvants is not new. It has been used for years in making vaccines against other diseases we are familiar with including against polio, hepatitis A and flu.

6. DOES THE VACCINE CAUSE SIDE EFFECTS?

The most common side effects following vaccination with the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine are mild to moderate and include injection site pain, swelling, pruritus, redness and induration, as well as headache, fatigue and myalgia. Side effects (aside from injection-site reactions) tend to be less frequent with the second dose.

Some people have no side effects, but that does not mean they are not also protected from COVID-19 infection.

The vaccine does not contain live SARS-CoV-2 virus and therefore cannot cause COVID-19 disease.

7. WHAT SHOULD I DO IN CASE OF SIDE EFFECTS?

Ask your vaccinator or doctor for advice on how to relieve symptoms of vaccine side effects. People sometimes faint after medical procedures, including vaccination. Tell your vaccinator if you feel dizzy or have vision changes or ringing in the ears before, during, or after receiving the injection.

For other signs that concern you, call your doctor. Severe and unusual adverse reactions should be reported to health authorities to support national and global monitoring of vaccine safety. Check with your vaccinator or doctor how to report an adverse event following immunization.

8. COULD I GET A SEVERE ALLERGIC REACTION?

As with any medicine, very rare severe allergic reactions are possible to vaccines, including the Sinovac CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine. Such reactions resolve if treatment is initiated immediately. Therefore, after receiving the vaccine dose, you will be asked to wait for 15 minutes in a dedicated area to get support, should an allergic reaction develop. If signs of a severe allergic reaction (hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, or weakness) develop after leaving the vaccination site, please call for emergency service support at the nearest hospital. If you developed allergic reaction after the first dose of the Sinovac CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine talk to your doctor about whether you can still get the second dose of this vaccine.

9. IS THE SINOVAC-CORONAVAC COVID-19 VACCINE SAFE?

Global and national vaccine safety systems ensure that all vaccines authorized for use are as safe as possible. While the work to develop the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine has moved much faster than usual, the process of testing and review has been the same as for other vaccines that have been in use for many years around the world. This vaccine has been tested in clinical trials on thousands of people in various countries worldwide and meets the strict standards of safety, quality and efficacy established by WHO. WHO has recommended this vaccine for use following thorough reviews of the clinical trial data and the vaccine has been authorized by national regulatory authorities in many countries throughout the world.

Even after these reviews the vaccine's safety is continuously monitored in each country and at the global level. These monitoring systems help to detect any rare or long-term adverse effects in a much larger patient population and over a long period.

10. DOES THE VACCINE WORK IN EVERYONE?

The vaccine has been tested on people aged 18 and older. If you have a weakened immune system, there is NO extra risk in taking the vaccine, but the vaccine may not work as well for you.

11. WHO SHOULD NOT GET THE SINOVAC-CORONAVAC COVID-19 VACCINE?

Most people will be able to safely get the vaccine, however in rare cases vaccination may not be advised.

Always talk to your doctor to assess whether you can get the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine if:

- you have had a severe allergic reaction to any of the ingredients in the vaccine;
- you have had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of this vaccine;
- you currently have a severe infection with a high temperature (over 38 °C);
- you have a problem with bleeding or bruising, or if you are taking a blood thinning medicine (anticoagulant);
- your immune system does not work properly (immunodeficiency), or you are taking medicines that weaken the immune system (such as high-dose corticosteroids, immunosuppressants or cancer medicines);
- you received antibody treatment for COVID-19 disease within the previous 90 days;
- you have received vaccination with any other vaccine against other diseases in the past 14 days
- you are pregnant.

12. I ALREADY HAD COVID-19. SHOULD I STILL GET VACCINATED?

Yes. Vaccination of individuals who already had COVID-19 is safe. The vaccine will reduce your risk of getting COVID-19 again; and even if you do get infected following vaccination, it can reduce the seriousness of your symptoms.

13. I CURRENTLY HAVE COVID-19. CAN I STILL GET VACCINATED?

Suppose you have tested positive for COVID-19 and you are experiencing signs and symptoms of the disease. In that case, you should not take the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine until after you have recovered from your illness and you are no longer in isolation. Ask a healthcare professional to help you determine when you should receive your vaccine.

14. I AM PREGNANT (OR BREASTFEEDING). SHOULD I STILL GET VACCINATED?

All pregnant women are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 infection, but some pregnant women are even more at risk including those 35 years and older or those who have medical conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure (hypertension). COVID-19 disease in pregnant women has been associated with an increased risk of preterm birth.

The Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine was not widely tested on pregnant women so the evidence available at this time is limited. However, there is no evidence that the vaccine is unsafe if you're pregnant. Inactivated vaccines containing an adjuvant have been safely used in pregnant women for several decades. Pregnant women should receive the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 if the benefit of vaccination to the pregnant woman (reduced risk of getting COVID-19 that could lead to severe disease and preterm birth) outweighs the potential vaccine risks that have not yet been widely studied in the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine.

As the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine is not a live virus vaccine, you can get vaccinated if you are breastfeeding. WHO does NOT recommend that you discontinue breastfeeding before or after vaccination, as breastfeeding is very important for your child.

Please speak to your doctor if you have additional questions regarding vaccination during pregnancy or whilst breastfeeding.

15. I AM AN OLDER ADULT. IS IT SAFE FOR ME TO TAKE THE VACCINE? DOES THE VACCINE WORK FOR OLDER ADULTS?

Yes. Though the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine was not widely tested in adults over the age of 60 years in clinical trials, there are no theoretical reasons to believe that the vaccine is not safe in older adults. After the vaccine was used in countries (e.g. in Chile) further data was collected, that indicate that the vaccine is safe in older adults.

The risk of severe disease and death due to COVID-19 increases steeply with age. WHO therefor recommends the Sinovac-CoronaVac for people aged 60 years and older to protect them as soon as possible from COVID-19.

16. IS THE SINOVAC-CORONAVAC COVID-19 VACCINE SAFE FOR PERSONS WITH MEDICAL CONDITIONS?

People with certain medical conditions are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 disease. The Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine was tested in people with obesity and hypertension. The vaccine was just as safe in these persons as persons who do not have these same conditions. WHO therefore recommends the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine for persons with medical conditions that increase their risk of severe illness from COVID-19 disease.

17. CAN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS BELOW 18 YEARS RECEIVE THE SINOVAC-CORONAVAC

COVID-19 VACCINE?

No. As of June 2021, the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine has not been tested in children or adolescents below the age of 18 years, and it therefore not recommended for anyone below 18 years of age.

18. HOW MANY DOSES DO I NEED?

Two doses of the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine are needed to achieve full and longer-lasting protection. WHO recommends that the two doses are given within an interval of 2-4 weeks between doses. If you missed the scheduled time for the second dose, it is important to return to get it as soon as it is possible.

The WHO recommends that you receive the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine for both of your doses.

The following people should not receive the second dose of vaccine:

- people who have had a severe allergic reaction to the first dose or any of the ingredients in the vaccine.

19. CAN I RECEIVE THE COVID-19 VACCINE ON THE SAME DAY AS ANOTHER VACCINE?

No. WHO recommends that you wait at least 14 days after your COVID-19 vaccine before getting any other vaccine, including a flu vaccine or tetanus vaccine. If you have recently received any other vaccine first, wait at least 14 days before getting your COVID-19 vaccine.

20. HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE THE VACCINE TO WORK?

It takes 2 weeks, after getting the first dose, for the vaccine to work. You will have the best protection from COVID-19 starting 2 weeks after the second dose, which you should get 2-4 weeks after your first dose.

21. AFTER GETTING VACCINATED, DO I STILL NEED TO CONTINUE WITH PROTECTIVE MEASURES?

COVID-19 is a new disease and much about it is still unknown. Experts don't know yet whether vaccination will fully prevent vaccinated persons from passing the virus on to others, if they have no symptoms themselves. And they don't know how long protection gained through vaccination will last. Moreover, no vaccine is 100% effective. So, while vaccination will greatly reduce your chances of developing COVID-19 disease, there is still a chance that you could become infected.

The virus that causes COVID-19 disease is constantly changing. These changes can lead to new strains or variants (different forms) of the virus. Some of the new virus variants may be easier to spread to other people or cause more severe illness. Some people who have already had one type of the COVID-19 virus, the Sars-CoV-2 virus, may get infected again with a new strain. Scientists are studying whether the Sinovac-CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine will protect you if you get infected with one of the more recent strains.

For all these reasons, even after getting the vaccine you will need to follow government recommendations on protective measures (such as wearing a mask that covers your nose and mouth, washing your hands often, following physical distancing). Together with vaccination, this gives you and others the best protection from catching the virus.

22. WHAT ARE THE INGREDIENTS OF SINOVAC-CORONAVAC COVID-19 VACCINE?

One dose (0.5 ml) contains:

- Inactivated SARS-CoV-2 Virus (CZ02 strain) (the active ingredient). The vaccine does not contain the live COVID-19 virus itself.
- Aluminum hydroxide (the adjuvant),
- and the following ingredients:
    - disodium hydrogen phosphate,
    - sodium dihydrogen phosphate,
    - sodium chloride
    - water.