

# Singapore's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

by the Ministry of Health

It has been almost half a year since Singapore's COVID-19 Vaccination Programme for Singaporeans and long-term residents began in December 2020. At the start, we prioritised vaccinations for those who were at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19 infection, such as healthcare and frontline workers, as well as vulnerable groups such as the elderly and those with more complex chronic conditions. Since then, we have extended vaccinations to those aged 40 and above. As of 13 May 2021, we have administered more than 3 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine and if all goes well, we are looking to complete the vaccination programme by the end of 2021.

## Seeking Advice on Vaccination

Dr Koh Eng Hoe, of Assurance Medicare Clinic and Surgery, shared that some of his patients sought advice on whether they are suitable for the COVID-19 vaccine. Other patients also called the clinic with similar queries.

Dr Tan Wee Meng, from Mei Ling Clinic, noted that the "general mood is optimistic" and most "express a hope that the vaccination will allow us to return to a more normal life". He added that seniors wish to be vaccinated to "protect them(selves) and their families too".

You may have seen the contraindications poster online and at a community space near you. It serves as a quick visual reference for the indications and contraindications of the COVID-19 vaccine, and whether the vaccination is safe for those who are suffering from common chronic conditions, such as diabetes, high cholesterol and hypertension. It is also safe for those who have mild allergies to medication, food or insect bites. There are only a few instances where we recommend individuals to defer being vaccinated. These include individuals who suffer from a history of anaphylaxis, have severely weakened immune systems, or have a very low platelet count.

## Patients' Concerns

From the outset, the Ministry of Health (MOH) worked with the People's Association (PA) and the Silver Generation Office (SGO) from the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) to reach out to and share with seniors about the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme and encourage them to get vaccinated.

Many of the seniors shared concerns about their medical eligibility to be vaccinated, given their medical history, such as having allergies to certain foods or medication, or

suffering from specific chronic conditions. Individuals with complex conditions were advised to approach their regular family doctor to seek advice.

Dr Tan noted that allergies were a significant concern earlier this year, but he is now receiving fewer allergy-related queries. This could possibly be attributed to the subsequent provision to the public of a clearer definition of what constitutes an anaphylactic reaction. Further, guidelines have also been revised and individuals with multiple allergies and NSAIDs-induced angioedema not amounting to anaphylaxis are now medically eligible to be vaccinated.

Dr Tan added that some may have "heard conflicting information from both official and unofficial sources". Fortunately, these patients have approached their regular doctors, who have helped to debunk the myths. One example was the myth that the mRNA vaccine can change their genetic makeup. Dr Lim from Lee Clinic would explain "the science" behind the vaccine whenever this was brought up.

Some individuals were also worried that they or their parents are too old and frail, and/or suffer from multiple chronic conditions and hence would not be able to tolerate the side effects of the vaccine. In response, Dr Lim would advise that "it is precisely because of their multiple conditions and old age that they should be vaccinated."

Dr Koh also advised patients with fear of side effects that these side effects are generally mild and only last for a few days and would recommend for all who are medically eligible to make an appointment to be vaccinated. In addition, he pointed out to patients that the efficacy rate of preventing symptomatic disease for the vaccines approved for use in Singapore is very high, at about 95%.

## Ensuring that doctors have up-to-date information

To equip doctors with the necessary information to best advise patients on whether they are medically eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, MOH has issued circulars on the indications and contraindications to COVID-19 vaccination, the management of anaphylaxis and severe allergic reactions, as well as on reporting vaccine recipients who experience serious/life-threatening adverse effects following vaccination. As more research data becomes available, MOH will issue more updates via circular to ensure that doctors have the latest information.

*To equip doctors with the necessary information to best advise patients on whether they are medically eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, MOH has issued circulars on the indications and contraindications to COVID-19 vaccination, the management of anaphylaxis and severe allergic reactions, as well as on reporting vaccine recipients who experience serious/life-threatening adverse effects following vaccination.*

Further to this, online information sessions and townhalls have been organised by various parties, including MOH and the Academy of Medicine. Some of these sessions featured members of the Expert Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination (EC19V) such as A/Prof Benjamin Ong and A/Prof Lim Poh Lian, as well as Chairman of the Section of Clinical Immunologists and Allergists, Dr Bernard Thong. Examples of topics covered in these sessions include evaluating individuals with allergy history for COVID-19 vaccination and why our local guidelines differ from international guidelines. Dr Tan felt the EC19V "has done an

excellent job in clarifying the conditions that may preclude a patient from being vaccinated", and the lectures were "incredibly informative and provided us with a reference from which to advise patients."

MOH has also produced a series of videos, brochures, posters and information sheets, for doctors to share with patients when the need arises. Dr Lim said that she would usually share the latest inclusion criteria with her patients, and this was where MOH's materials have "come in handy".

For more information and materials, please visit [www.moh.gov.sg/covid-19/vaccination](http://www.moh.gov.sg/covid-19/vaccination) or [www.vaccine.gov.sg](http://www.vaccine.gov.sg).

**SINGAPORE'S COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME**  
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

**VACCINATION**

**Can I Receive the Vaccination?**

**Contraindications (Red X):**

- History of Anaphylaxis** (life-threatening allergic reactions)
- Severely weakened immune system** (eg. recent organ transplant, or HIV with CD4 count < 200)
- Have a very low platelet count of <50K**

*\*You can register your interest to be kept informed should there be an alternative.*

**Safe to Receive (Green Checkmark):**

- Diabetes
- High Cholesterol
- Hypertension
- Asthma
- G6PD Deficiency
- Taking TCM Medication
- Undergoing Kidney Dialysis
- Received another vaccine (for a different disease) \*Wait 2 weeks
- On regular blood thinning medication, or have stable bleeding or anticoagulation disorders (Hold firm pressure at the injection site for at least 5min post-vaccination)
- Non-severe allergies to medication, food or insect bites

*If you are unsure about your medical conditions, please check with your doctor before registering for the vaccination.*

For more information, visit [vaccine.gov.sg](http://vaccine.gov.sg), or call 1800-333-9999.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH SINGAPORE