



COVID-19 Vaccines and HIV

South Africa is ramping up to rollout COVID-19 vaccinations across the country. If you are registered on the AfA programme, we will keep you updated and let you know as soon as access to these vaccines is made possible. In the meantime, you may have questions about the vaccine that are specific to your HIV diagnosis. AfA has a clinical committee that is made up of some of South Africa's leading experts in HIV and other infectious diseases. We are staying close to developments on COVID-19 and will share important information with you as things unfold.

Is it safe for me to get a COVID-19 vaccine if I'm living with HIV?

Developers of COVID-19 vaccines have considered people living with HIV in their research and some have recruited HIV positive volunteers to participate in their vaccine studies. All of the vaccines under development or approved by regulators include some of the genetic material from SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) but **not** the whole virus. **This means they are not live vaccines and so are safe in people with damaged immune systems.**

It is possible to experience side effects with most vaccines and the same is true after COVID-19 vaccination. Most side effects are mild and typically can include a sore arm at the injection site, fevers/chills, fatigue, nausea or muscle aches. These side effects show your body is mounting an immune response. But different people respond differently - if you don't experience any side effects it does not mean your body isn't mounting an immune response. Side effects can start around 6 hours after you've been vaccinated, peak at 24 hours and resolve in 2 to 3 days. If you need to treat pain and fever during this time, use paracetamol.

A very small number of people have had a serious allergic reaction. This can be safely managed by keeping people under observation for 15 to 30 minutes after they receive the vaccine. You should contact your doctor immediately if:

- You develop an allergic reaction, even if mild
- Vaccine side effects get worse or do not resolve after 3 days
- You become pregnant within 3 months of receiving a COVID-19 vaccine

There is no reason to expect that you are more likely to experience either mild or more severe reactions just because you are living with HIV.



Why is it important for me to get vaccinated if I'm living with HIV?

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It's important for everyone to get vaccinated for COVID-19. Vaccines are one of the most powerful tools available to us for preventing severe disease due to SARS-CoV-2. There is some evidence that people living with HIV may be more vulnerable to developing severe COVID-19 symptoms and so getting vaccinated is even more critical if you are HIV positive. It's too early to tell how effective the vaccines will be at reducing transmission of COVID-19, but we do know they are effective at preventing severe disease and death.

Until the number of people with COVID-19 infection have fallen so low that all national lockdown levels are lifted, it's essential to continue following the preventive measures that are currently recommended:

- Always wear a mask in public
- Wash your hands regularly
- Keep 1.5 m apart from others outside your home as much as possible
- Avoid crowds and confined spaces – rather have small gatherings and meet outdoors

All of these measures should still be followed even after you've been vaccinated.

As someone who's living with HIV, taking your antiretroviral therapy (ARVs) according to your doctor's instructions remains one of the most important things you can do for your health. When taken properly, ARVs keep you healthy and reduce the risk of getting severe COVID-19 infection.

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