



Guidelines for COVID-19 Vaccination Winter/Spring 2023

Vaccines

From 1 January 2023, two vaccines against COVID-19 are used in Iceland for **primary vaccinations**:

1. Comirnaty WT (Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine against original SARS-CoV-2 virus)
2. Jcovden WT (Janssen vaccine against original SARS-CoV-2 virus)

These vaccines evoke and stimulate a response to the same antigen, the S-protein of the *original* SARS-CoV-2 virus associated with the 2020 COVID waves. The designation WT above refers to this (Wild Type).

Vaccination significantly reduces the risk of serious illness from COVID-19, even with the [emergence of the Omicron](#) variant and subvariants, but has not been shown to be very useful in preventing transmission to or from a vaccinated person. Protection wanes over time, and it has therefore been found necessary to recommend booster vaccinations at least 4 months after primary vaccination.

For **booster vaccinations**, two* vaccines against COVID-19 are used in winter/spring 2022–2023:

1. Comirnaty Original/Omicron (WT/O; vaccine Pfizer/BioNTech)
2. Spikevax bivalent Original/Omicron (WT/O; vaccine Moderna)

Both of these vaccines contain mRNA that our cells read and subsequently synthesise the S-protein of the original SARS-CoV-2 virus associated with the 2020 COVID waves **and** the S-protein of the BA.1 or BA.5 subtype Omicron variants of SARS-CoV-2 (the marking WT/O refers to this). The immune system reacts to these proteins and creates antibodies against two types of the S-protein. Antibodies against both types of the S-protein are better stimulated in previously vaccinated subjects receiving WT/O vaccine than if stimulated with a vaccine against the original S-protein alone (see news item from the [European Medicines Agency](#)). Antibody stimulation against Omicron subtypes is comparable whether a vaccine containing S-protein BA.1 or BA.5 is used. Information about the composition of the vaccine that each person has received can be found on a certificate that is available at Heilsuvera (see the final section below).

Side effects of vaccines against COVID-19 are usually mild and are related to the reaction of the immune system against vaccine antigens:

1. Localised side effects, e.g. pain, swelling, redness or itching at the injection site, which can last for several days up to a week.
2. Side effects, e.g. fever, headache, muscle pain and weakness, are rather common side effects that usually last 2–4 days (flu-like symptoms).

Depending on the vaccine, side effects are more likely with the first or second dose. In general, side

effects other than lymphadenopathy are less frequent and/or milder with booster doses than with primary vaccination.

Serious side effects are rare individually but have been reported in large vaccination campaigns over the past 2 years. See [article about rare and/or serious side effects of COVID-19 vaccines](#). Some of them can be life-threatening, and the use of certain vaccines has been limited in Iceland because of them.

Individuals with an **allergy** to vaccine ingredients or a history of anaphylaxis due to injections or of unknown causes should **not** receive vaccination against COVID-19 except at the discretion of an allergist, in a setting where treatment of anaphylactic shock is readily available.

The Chief Epidemiologist recommends the use of COVID-19 vaccines according to the following from

1 February 2023: see also [table](#).

Primary vaccination

1. Children 6 months to **4 years**: vaccination **not** recommended (vaccine has marketing authorisation but not available in Iceland)
2. Children 5–11 years:
Vaccine: Comirnaty WT 10 mcg/dose
 - **two** doses with at least a 19-day interval between them.
 - severely immunocompromised children **should receive** an *additional* dose 1–3 months after dose #2 – Comirnaty WT must be used for that dose as well.
3. Children 12–17 years:
Vaccine: Comirnaty WT 30 mcg/dose
 - **two** doses with at least a 19-day interval between them.
 - severely immunocompromised children **should receive** an *additional* dose 1–3 months after dose #2 – **WT/O vaccine is recommended.**
4. 18–59 years:
Vaccine: Comirnaty WT 30 mcg/dose
Jcovden WT can be used according to [table](#)
 - **two** doses, interval varies according to vaccines, at least 3 weeks.
 - severely immunocompromised individual **should receive** an *additional* dose 1–3 months after dose #2 – **WT/O vaccine is recommended.**
5. 60 years and older:
Vaccine: Comirnaty WT 30 mcg/dose
Jcovden WT if desired
 - **two** doses, interval varies according to vaccines, at least 3 weeks.
 - severely immunocompromised individual **should receive** an *additional* dose 1–3 months after dose #2 – **WT/O vaccine is recommended.**

Booster vaccination

1. Children **≤5 years**: booster vaccination may **not** be given
2. Children 5–11 years:
Vaccine: Comirnaty **WT/O** 10 mcg/dose
 - children **may receive** a booster dose at least 4 months after primary vaccination.
3. Children 12–17 years:
Vaccine: Comirnaty **WT/O** 30 mcg/dose
 - children **may receive** a booster dose at least 4 months after primary vaccination.
4. 18–59 years:
Vaccine: Comirnaty WT/O 30 mcg/dose
Spikevax WT/O **50** mcg/dose may be used according to [table](#)
 - first booster dose **generally** at least 4 months after primary vaccination.
 - **second** booster dose
 - for individuals with severe immunosuppression at least 4 months from previous dose.
 - for **staff of healthcare institutions and nursing homes** at least 6 months from previous booster dose. Reducing the risk of infection among staff as much as possible reduces the risk of infection to patients and staff absences.
 - others at this age **may** receive another booster dose 4 months after the first if requested or recommended by a doctor.
 - **further** booster doses at least 4 months since the last dose, especially if there has been a change in the composition of the vaccine: **only for at-risk groups**.
5. 60 years and older:
Vaccine: Comirnaty WT/O 30 mcg/dose
Spikevax WT/O 50 mcg/dose
 - **first** booster dose **generally** 4 months after primary vaccination.
 - **further** booster doses **generally** every 4 months, especially if there has been a change in the composition of the vaccine.

Availability of COVID vaccines

The Ministry of Health makes contracts for the purchase of COVID vaccines on behalf of Iceland, in connection with the joint purchases of European countries (EFTA and European Union countries). Contracted vaccine is free of charge to the vaccinated. Vaccines against COVID-19 are not commercially available.

Registration of COVID vaccinations

Cf. Regulation on vaccinations [no. 221/2001](#), all vaccinations carried out in Iceland shall be registered in the vaccination database of the Chief Epidemiologist. A special notification and registration system was developed for COVID vaccinations in Iceland, and all registrations there are submitted to the Chief Epidemiologist's database. Vaccinations abroad with vaccines that are not used in Iceland must be registered in the medical record system Saga in order for them to be included in the vaccination database.

Certificate of COVID vaccination

Iceland is a member of the European countries' joint project on certificates related to COVID-19 infections and vaccinations. Certificates with QR codes are available at Heilsuvera. Individuals without electronic ID can receive a certificate via e-mail from the healthcare provider who administered the vaccination in Iceland. The certificate is valid for 9 months from the primary vaccination, but there is no defined validity period after the first booster dose. The QR code is valid for 9 months from when it is downloaded / certificate is downloaded. The European regulation on the certificates is valid until 30 June 2023.