

# Coronavirus vaccination for risk groups

Information for people at increased risk of  
severe COVID-19 disease

Last updated: 02.11.2023, based on the COVID-19 vaccination recommendations from STIKO) on 25.05.2023

Certain groups of people have a higher risk of becoming severely infected with COVID-19 when they become infected with the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. This includes, for example, **people aged 60 and over or people with certain pre-existing medical conditions**. For them, basic immunity and annual booster vaccinations against the coronavirus are particularly important.

## Why is vaccination particularly important for certain groups of people?

The coronavirus vaccination protects against severe COVID-19 disease and minimises long-term effects.

Infection with the coronavirus can lead to severe COVID-19 disease or even death, particularly in risk groups. Serious long-term effects (so-called [Long COVID](#)) are also possible.

Fully vaccinated people are less likely to have to be treated in intensive care units and are less likely to die if they get severe COVID-19 disease.

## How can I protect myself against the coronavirus?

Long-term protection against the coronavirus develops after several vaccinations or infections.

According to the German Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO), [basic immunity](#) provides protection against severe COVID-19 disease and minimises long-term effects. Basic immunity is achieved by coming into contact at least **3 times** with components of the coronavirus. Such contact can be **coronavirus vaccinations or coronavirus infections**. For the best possible basic immunity, the contact in 2 out of the 3 cases should be through vaccinations.

However, it is important that there is an **adequate gap** between the contact in these cases. If the gaps are too short, then the immune system may not have sufficient time to build up longer-term protection. Therefore, if the gaps are too short, an infection does not replace a vaccination.

## Is basic immunity recommended for me?

STIKO recommends basic immunity for **everyone aged 18 or over**. For basic immunity, **2 vaccinations** are initially recommended **at least 3 weeks** apart. In addition, a **booster vaccination is recommended at least 6 months** after the 2nd vaccination.

**Infection** with the coronavirus can replace **one** of the recommended vaccinations. In this case, the gap between the previous and subsequent vaccination must be **at least 3 months**.

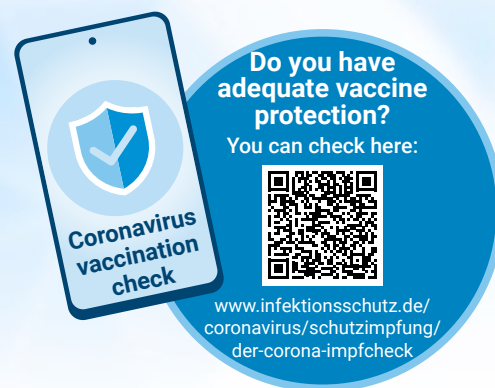
Basic immunity is also recommended in certain cases for **children from 6 months of age and for adolescents**. Basic immunity for children and adolescents is recommended if they

- Have certain pre-existing diseases
- Are looked after in a care home or
- Are close contacts (e.g. family members) of people whose immune system is unlikely to provide adequate protection after the vaccination.

## Which pre-existing medical conditions increase the risk of contracting severe COVID-19?

The risk of severe COVID-19 disease may be increased with various pre-existing medical conditions. These pre-existing medical conditions include, for example:

- Congenital or acquired immune deficiency (immunodeficiency) or relevant suppression of the immune system (immunosuppression)
- Chronic cardiovascular diseases
- Chronic respiratory diseases
- Chronic liver diseases
- Chronic kidney diseases
- Chronic disorders of the nervous system
- Dementia or mental disability
- Psychiatric diseases
- Metabolic diseases, such as severe obesity and diabetes mellitus
- Down's syndrome (trisomy 21) and
- Active cancer diseases.



## For whom are further booster vaccinations recommended?

The protection provided by the coronavirus vaccination **becomes weaker over time**. For people with a higher risk of getting a severe case of the COVID-19 disease, an **annual booster vaccination** is therefore recommended. The aim is to strengthen and enhance vaccination protection.

An annual booster vaccination is recommended for the following groups of people:

- In the case of a higher **risk of infection**: This applies to residents in **nursing/care homes** or people working in nursing/care homes or medical facilities with **direct patient contact**
- If there is a **risk of getting a severe case of COVID-19** from the age of 60 or due to certain underlying medical conditions
- As **close contacts of people with a weak immune system** (e.g. family members) whose immune system is unlikely to provide adequate protection after the vaccination.

These groups of people should have the booster vaccination every year or at least 12 months apart from the last vaccination or a coronavirus infection. The booster vaccination should preferably be given in the autumn because it is assumed that in autumn and winter the risk of infection is higher than in the warmer months. Booster vaccinations should preferably be given with mRNA vaccines adapted to the latest coronavirus variants.

The flu vaccination is also usually recommended for people with an increased risk of getting a severe case of the COVID-19 disease. A COVID-19 vaccination and flu vaccination can usually be given at the same appointment. The vaccination can generally be given in two different arms.



**You can find information on the flu vaccination here:**

[www.impfen-info.de/grippeimpfung](http://www.impfen-info.de/grippeimpfung)



## What applies to people with a weak immune system?

If the immune system is weakened, the risk of getting a severe case of the COVID-19 disease is increased. On the other hand, it is possible that vaccinations may not work as well as in healthy people. Therefore, **additional vaccinations** may be necessary in the case of people with a weak immune system.

If someone has a weak immune system, STIKO recommends that **close contacts** (for example, family members) should also receive an annual booster vaccination. Children from 6 months of age and adolescents are then also recommended to have basic immunity and an annual booster vaccination.

Please contact a doctor if you have any questions about vaccination or SARS-CoV-2 pre-exposure prophylaxis.

STIKO recommends a **SARS-CoV-2 pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)** in addition to the coronavirus vaccination for some people aged 12 years and over with a significantly weakened immune system. In the pre-exposure prophylaxis, certain **antibodies** are administered to protect against severe COVID-19 disease. If you have any questions, please consult your doctor.

## What vaccine reactions can occur?

The vaccines are generally **well tolerated**. They can lead to normal vaccination reactions, such as pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache or even fever. The symptoms usually disappear again after a few days. Severe side effects are **very rare**.

## Where can I get vaccinated?

You can get vaccinated in medical practices, at company doctors and in pharmacies. Vaccination is free of charge.

## Why are hygiene rules still important?

Coronavirus vaccination provides good protection against severe COVID-19. However, it cannot provide full protection.

Certain behavioural measures, such as hand washing and wearing a mask, can help to protect against the coronavirus and other respiratory infections.

## Further information

🔗 Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA):  
[www.infektionsschutz.de/coronavirus/schutzimpfung/impfung-gegen-covid-19/#c17902](http://www.infektionsschutz.de/coronavirus/schutzimpfung/impfung-gegen-covid-19/#c17902)

🔗 Federal Ministry of Health: [www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/coronavirus/](http://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/coronavirus/)

🔗 Robert Koch Institute: [www.rki.de/SharedDocs/FAQ/COVID-Impfen/gesamt.html](http://www.rki.de/SharedDocs/FAQ/COVID-Impfen/gesamt.html)

