



London

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2021;374:n2179<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n2179>

Published: 03 September 2021

Sixty seconds on . . . covid booster vaccines

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Can I get a booster shot now?

Not in the UK (yet), although you may be eligible for a third dose.

What's the difference?

A booster is given to people who have received a full vaccine course and developed a good response. That immune response often wanes over time, so booster doses are given to “boost” the immune response to previous levels. Third doses are being given to people who are immunocompromised such that their immune response was likely to have been lower. Immune systems can be suppressed because of underlying health conditions or medical treatment.

Who will get a third dose?

The UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has recommended offering “a third primary dose” to people aged 12 years and over who had severe immunosuppression around the time of their first or second dose.¹

So, I won't get a third dose?

No, but you may get a booster dose later: the committee is still mulling that one over. If recommended, boosters may be offered to over 50s and others who are at higher risk from covid, alongside the flu jab.

Will I need a booster?

Almost certainly, eventually. The good news is that the UK may not need boosters as early as other countries. It controversially delayed second doses of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines by as much as eight weeks—stretching the dosing interval from 3-4 weeks to as much as 12 weeks—to allow more people to be given first doses earlier. Studies now show that a longer dosing interval is associated with a better immune response.

That's a boost! What if I want to travel abroad?

You may need a booster dose earlier to travel to some countries, to avoid multiple covid tests and quarantine. Croatia and Austria, for example, consider travellers to be fully vaccinated only if their last dose was given within 270 days.

Are other countries offering boosters?

Some countries have set out plans to offer boosters to elderly people and to people who received the AstraZeneca vaccine or the single dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine. A few countries, including Israel, Austria, Hungary, South Korea, and the US, are offering them more widely, 4-9 months after the last vaccine dose.

¹ Wise J. Covid-19: UK will offer third vaccine dose to severely immunosuppressed people. *BMJ* 2021;374:n2160. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n2160. <https://www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n2160>

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