

# COVID-19 Vaccination Roll-Out

By Agency for Integrated Care



Shortly after COVID-19 grew to become a pandemic, Singapore swiftly moved into action to secure vaccines. On 21 December 2020, the first batch of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine arrived in Singapore.

In line with recommendations by the Expert Committee on COVID-19 the Ministry of Health has commenced vaccinations starting with groups that are most at risk, such as healthcare workers, frontline and essential service workers, as well as seniors. The vaccination exercise will progressively be rolled out to the whole population in tandem with the shipments of vaccines.

## Who the Vaccine is Not Recommended For

Currently, the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is not recommended for:



- A. Pregnant women
- B. Severely immunocompromised persons
- C. Children under the age of 16 years

until more efficacy and safety data becomes available for these subgroups.

The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is also not advisable for those with a history of anaphylaxis to other drugs, vaccines, food, insect stings, or unknown triggers (idiopathic). Anyone who develops an allergic reaction to the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine should not receive the second dose. Patients or healthcare workers who wish to be vaccinated but have any of the abovementioned contraindications should be advised that the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is currently not recommended for them. They may be able to get vaccinated later if further efficacy and safety data becomes available or they may be able to get vaccinated with other COVID-19 vaccines.

We strongly encourage GPs and clinic staff to be vaccinated early, and to encourage your patients to receive the vaccination when it is made available to them. Overall, a high vaccination coverage will ensure as many people are as protected as possible. A comprehensive vaccination coverage will be a key enabler in supporting Singapore in her re-opening and expedite the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all GPs and clinic staff for their continuous care and support for our patients, and partnership in the national fight against COVID-19.

We spoke with Dr Kelvin Goh of Northeast Medical Group, and Dr Jeffrey Loh of Lian Clinic on their experience of being a vaccinator as well as having received the vaccine.



Dr Jeffrey Loh



Dr Kelvin Goh

## Q Why is vaccination against COVID-19 important?

Dr Goh: When more of us are vaccinated, it will be harder for the virus to spread, which will make society in general safer. Don't we all want to travel again?

Dr Loh: Vaccination prevents the chance of getting COVID-19 and also guards against greater severity of the disease. It is important for the population to have a high take-up rate to establish herd immunity.

## Q There are eligible patients who might still be undecided about being vaccinated. Based on your experience, what are some concerns patients might have and how do you help to clarify their doubts?

Dr Goh: There are two common concerns: 1) effectiveness of the vaccine – I would share with them the vaccine effectiveness data; and 2) perceived side effects and vaccine safety issues. I would acknowledge their concerns, and explain that all vaccinations have a small risk of serious side effects and then tell them the measures we have in place to ensure patient safety. Some patients in their early 20s have asked why they need to be vaccinated in view of the low mortality for their age group. I would tell them that low risk does not mean no risk, and explain that as frontline workers, it's our duty to our patients to get vaccinated for the collective good of our population.

Dr Loh: Safety – although the vaccines were developed quickly, most of these vaccines have undergone clinical trial before approval. Side effects – these are minimal and easy to cope. Severe anaphylatic reactions are extremely rare – 3 in 100,000. Co-morbidities – actually, those with chronic illnesses like diabetes and cardiac disease need to be vaccinated even more, compared to others.

## Q Could you share your personal experience of receiving the vaccine?

Dr Goh: The entire vaccination experience was wonderful. I had both my doses at Punggol Polyclinic. From the logistics to the delivery, I must say it was a job well done. There was minimal discomfort from both doses. Personally I experienced no significant side effects.

Dr Loh: It was a safe experience; I had minimal pain at the injection side. While I developed a sore arm after a few hours, I had no other issues.