

What are the side effects of COVID-19 VACCINES?

One of the biggest concerns about having a COVID-19 vaccine is whether you're going to experience any side effects – and how long they will last. Here's what you need to know.

According to the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA), COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective in helping to protect you from developing severe COVID-19 disease, hospitalisation and death.

It's important to understand that experiencing some side effects after having your vaccine is completely normal. This is simply a sign that your immune system is doing its job, working hard to help your body to build protection against the virus. However, it's also completely normal not to have any side effects at all, and you shouldn't be concerned that this means that the vaccine is not working for you.



WHAT SIDE EFFECTS SHOULD I EXPECT?

It's common to experience mild to moderate side effects after having any COVID-19 vaccine, including the Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer-BioNTech jabs, says GP Dr Sheri Fanaroff. These include:

- Pain, redness and swelling at the injection site
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Fever
- Nausea

'These usually start within a day or two of having the vaccine and should disappear after a couple of days. In some cases side effects may affect your ability to do daily activities, but again, this should resolve within a few days. Remember that side effects are reportedly worse after the second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, so be prepared for a likelihood of that. Anaphylaxis (allergic reactions) and fainting are rare side effects that may occur immediately after having the vaccine. This is why it's important to be observed for 15 minutes after each vaccine dose.'

If you experience severe headaches lasting longer than three days, severe abdominal pain, a rash of tiny red spots under the skin or around the injection site, leg pain or swelling, chest pain or shortness of breath, this may suggest an extremely rare clotting condition.

In this instance, you should seek medical attention as soon as possible.





HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR SYMPTOMS

The **US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** recommends using a clean, cool, wet washcloth to help to reduce any redness, pain or swelling at the site where you had the jab. They also suggest that you try using or exercising your arm, to drink lots of fluids and to keep cool if you have a fever.

Dr Fanaroff recommends taking two paracetamol tablets just before or just after having the vaccine, and again every eight hours – for 24 hours afterwards. She suggests calling your doctor if you experience any side effects that are not managed by paracetamol or that continue to linger.



WHAT IS 'COVID ARM'?

The **CDC** reports that some people experience a red, itchy, swollen, or painful rash on the site where they got the jab. These rashes – which are known as 'COVID arm' – tend to start within a few days to more than a week after the first shot and are sometimes quite large in size. Your doctor will prescribe treatment, which can include antihistamines if the rash is itchy and medicine, such as acetaminophen or a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, for pain. If you do experience 'COVID arm' after your first shot, you must still get your second dose, but be sure to mention this to the healthcare professional who administers your vaccination, when you do so as you may be advised to have your second jab in your other arm.



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