What we know about COVID-19

- COVID-19 has been in Ireland since late February and early March 2020.
- It usually causes symptoms like
  - Cough
  - High Temperature (38C or higher)
  - Shortness of Breath or difficulty breathing
  - Loss of Taste or Smell
- For most people symptoms can be managed with rest and over the counter medication….**BUT**

What we know about COVID-19

- COVID-19 is more than a cold!
  - If someone catches COVID-19 it can result in more severe disease.
  - This means some people may need to be admitted to hospital and in some cases they may unfortunately die.
  - This is more common in people with COVID-19 than in people with the flu for example.
  - Older people and people with certain conditions are at higher risk for more severe disease, but it can happen to anyone.
- In Ireland, as of March 2021
  - 4,396 people have died from Covid-19.
  - 13,024 people with COVID-19 needed admission to hospital.
- Long term complications

Picture – RTE Investigates

The consequences of " natural COVID-19" COVID-19

- Immunity… for ? 6 months
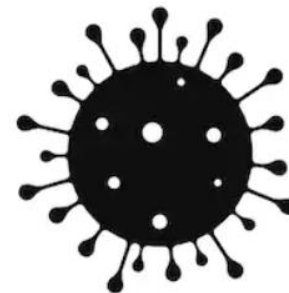- May be innocuous ("you might be grand")

BUT....

- May cause serious disease
- May cause permanent damage to your lungs
- May cause "long Covid"
- May cause death

AND

- You can spread it to other people who could be very sick and vulnerable and so might then have serious complications

"Natural immunity" to Covid-19 comes at a very high price (and may not last very long)

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines are like a personal trainer for your immune system!
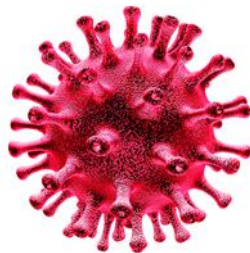
- Vaccines "train" your immune system by teaching it how to react to a particular germ or invader.

- Make the spike protein part of COVID-19

- Vaccines stimulate your immune system and get it working hard to protect you!

- If you do come across the virus in future, your immune system will respond faster.

  COVID-19 vaccines cannot give you COVID-19

Types of vaccines against COVID-19

- **Currently in Ireland there are 3 COVID-19 vaccines being used:**
- mRNA Vaccines:
  - Pfizer/BioNTech
  - Moderna vaccines
- Viral vector vaccines:
  - Oxford/Astra Zeneca,
  - Janssen (J&J) vaccine approved by European Medicines Agency but not available yet
- All the vaccines in use in Ireland have gone through very close testing and review by the European Medicines Agency to make sure they are safe and they work.

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Update to Astra Zeneca COVID-19 Vaccine

- There have been a few reports of very rare cases of blood clots associated with low levels of blood platelets (elements in the blood that help it to clot) with or without bleeding, including rare cases of clots in the blood vessels in the brain.

- We don't know yet if these very rare clots are anything to do with the vaccine, or if they would have happened anyway,

- The reports are really rare (in more than 20 million doses of the vaccine there were only 18 unusual clots reported)

- The benefits of the vaccine are much greater than the extremely small possibility of developing these clots.

- Remember the vaccine protects you against COVID-19. COVID-19 can make people very sick

Update to Astra Zeneca COVID-19 Vaccine:

What I need to know

- Even though the risk of blood clots is extremely low, you should know the signs to watch out for.

  Get urgent medical help if you get any of these symptoms after the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca:

  - breathlessness
  - pain in the chest or stomach
  - swelling or coldness in an arm or leg
  - severe or worsening headache or blurred vision
  - persistent bleeding, under the skin where there was no previous injury
  - multiple small bruises, reddish or purplish spots, or blood blisters under the skin

- More details on this vaccine safety update are available here.

COVID-19 VACCINE Public Health Advice

HSE

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Is there anyone who shouldn't get COVID-19 vaccines?

- **There are very few people who are advised not to get the vaccine**
  - These are people who have had a severe allergic reaction to this vaccine or parts of this vaccine in the past.
  - This is a specific type of allergic reaction called "anaphylaxis" which would have needed emergency treatment or admission to hospital.
  - It is very rare
  - People with less severe types of allergic reaction or allergic reactions to other injectable medicines or vaccines can still take the vaccine but will be observed for a little longer (30 minutes vs 15 minutes) after the vaccine to make sure there are no problems.
  - The Doctor / nurse / healthcare worker will make sure the vaccine is suitable for the person before giving it

Are there any side effects to the vaccines?

Side effects from COVID-19 vaccines

Mild side effects (more common)

- a sore or itchy arm
- swelling of lymph nodes/glands in the armpit
- feeling tired or sick.
- feeling hot and cold
- pains in your muscles or your joints
- vomiting or diarrhoea
- a headache

These are usually mild and go away after a few days.
Older people are less likely to experience these side effects

Other side effects (very few people get these)

- You may find it difficult to sleep for a while afterwards.
- You may have a reduced appetite.
- You may feel dizzy.
- You may sweat or have a rash.
- You may feel a weakness in your face muscles for a while afterwards, but this is rare, and happens as frequently in the general population who haven't been vaccinated

Serious side effects (like allergic reactions) are very rare

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What sort of questions do people have about COVID-19 vaccines?

Do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

- All of the COVID-19 vaccines currently licenced in Ireland are extremely effective at preventing death and hospitalisation.

- We know that the mRNA vaccines lowers the risk of COVID-19 by around 95% after two doses of the vaccine have been given

- The Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine is also very effective; the risk of developing COVID-19 is reduced by 82% once 2 doses of the vaccine have been received.

- All the vaccine reduced the risk of severe COVID-19/hospitalisation by **100%**

- **All the COVID-19 vaccines are suitable for most people**

- **You cannot choose which vaccine to get**

How long does the vaccine protect me for?

- We still don't know exactly how long immunity from COVID-19 lasts after the vaccine.

- Clinical trials are continuing to follow people up for a number of years after they received their vaccines.

- The results of these trials, and of other research, will help doctors and scientists decide if booster doses might be needed in the future.

- For now the EMA is not recommending booster doses once you have completed your vaccination schedule (two doses for most of the vaccines).

Could I still get COVID-19 even though I have had the vaccine?

- All the Covid-19 vaccines being used in Ireland are very effective.

- There's a small chance you might still get COVID-19 even if you have been vaccinated.

- But even if you do become infected, the vaccine will protect you from the serious illness the virus can sometimes cause.

- The vaccine takes a few weeks to work, so you still need to watch out for the symptoms of COVID-19 and get tested if you have them

COVID-19 VACCINE
Public Health Advice

Do I need the vaccine if I've had COVID-19 already?

Yes you should still get the COVID-19 vaccine to protect you against infection.

You need to wait 4 weeks after the start of symptoms or being diagnosed

After I get the COVID-19 vaccine, can I stop wearing my mask when I go to the supermarket?

- Unfortunately no!
- There is still a small chance you might get COVID-19 after you have had the vaccine.
- There is also a chance that you might spread COVID-19, even if you don't get sick yourself.
- That is why it is so important to hold firm, and continue to follow HSE and government advice about washing your hands, keeping your distance and wearing a face covering.
- Remember the vaccine is one weapon in our armour of protection against COVID-19 but we still need to follow the other advice to protect ourselves and others

Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe in pregnancy and for breastfeeding mothers?
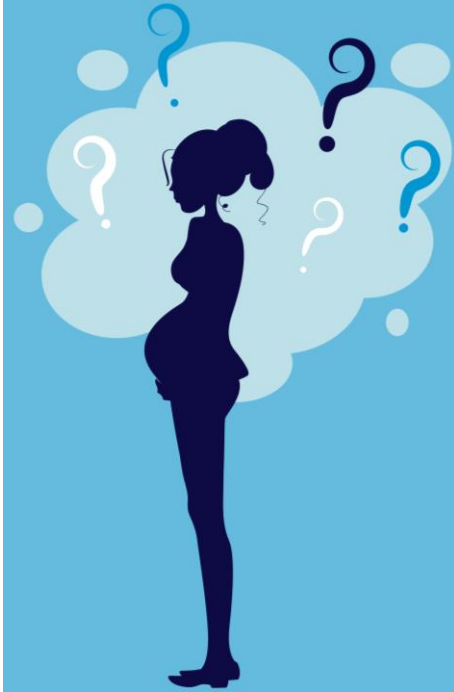
- If you are pregnant you can get COVID-19 vaccines. Your GP, midwife or obstetrician can talk to you about the benefits of getting the vaccine for you
- Getting the vaccine will stop you becoming very unwell from COVID-19.
- Being unwell from COVID-19 can cause complications like premature labour.
- Because the vaccines are still new, we are still learning about them as pregnant women were not included in original trials.
- But all the information we have at the moment tells us that if you get COVID-19 vaccine during your pregnancy there will be no effect on your baby.
- Make sure the person giving you the vaccine knows you are pregnant. This is because the vaccines should be given between 14-33 weeks of pregnancy.
- The vaccines are also safe if you are breastfeeding.

HSE

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What if I have an underlying condition – for example immunosuppressed.

- People with underlying conditions are more at risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 so getting the vaccine is really important for them
- If you have a weakened immune system, your COVID-19 vaccine may not work as well for you, but there is no extra risk in getting it
- Talk to your GP or hospital consultant if you have questions about the vaccine

Useful links

- www.hse.ie/covid-19-vaccine/
- http://www.hpra.ie/homepage/medicines/covid-19-updates/approval-of-covid-19-vaccines-frequently-asked-questions
- https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/treatments-vaccines-covid-19