

General FAQs: Booster shots

Q. Why do I need a booster?

Because it's the best way to ensure you are as protected as you can be against severe COVID-19 illness, hospitalisation and death. Vaccines slow down the spread of COVID-19, and if you are fully vaccinated and have your booster shots, your risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, ending up in a hospital, or even dying, is much smaller.

Q. Are booster shots safe?

Yes! All COVID-19 vaccines currently approved or authorised in South Africa are proven to be safe. Billions of people around the world have been safely vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19.

Q. I've had COVID-19: do I really need a booster? Yes – your COVID-19 immunity, whether from an injection or an infection, starts to fade after about six months, so a booster will keep your immune system strong.

Q. How do booster shots work?

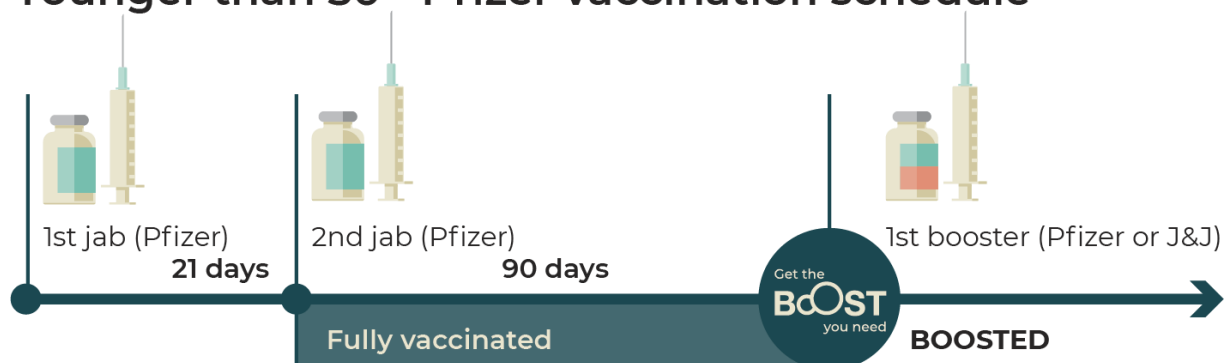
When you are vaccinated against COVID-19, your immunity doesn't last forever – after some time, it starts to fade. So, a booster shot brings your immunity up to a higher level again. And that means you maximise your protection against severe COVID-19 illness, hospitalisation and death.

Q. Who should get a booster and when?

Everyone older than 18 years of age can get boosted. The below schedule is the recommended frequency and interval of COVID-19 vaccines, however as of 30 January 2023, anyone aged 18 or above, can have an additional booster shot, 180 days after their last booster jab.

If you are 18 – 49 years old, you need 3 shots. As of 30 January 2023, you can have a 4th jab 180 days after your last booster as an additional shot.

Younger than 50 - Pfizer vaccination schedule



If you started with Pfizer, you can have 1 booster shot 90 days after being fully vaccinated (e.g. You've had 2 Pfizer jabs). You can get your booster after 90 days of being fully vaccinated. Your booster can be either Pfizer or J&J. As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your 1st booster.

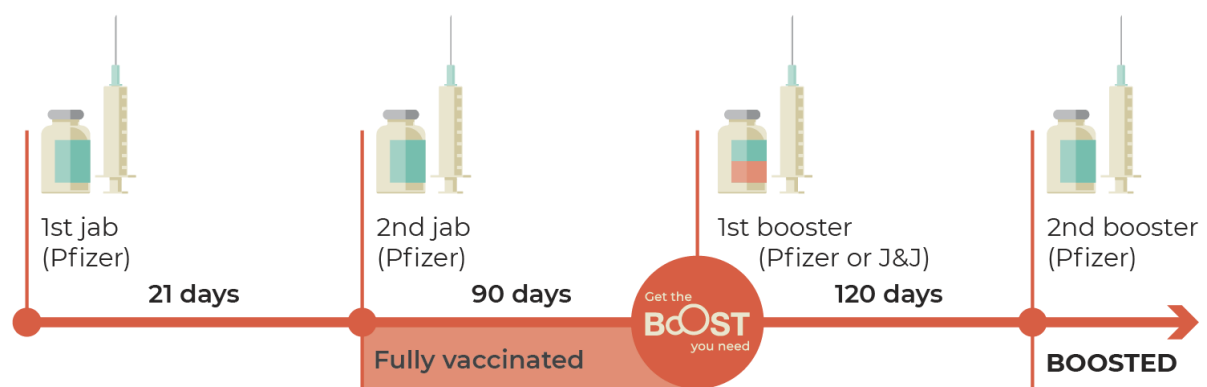
Younger than 50 - J&J vaccination schedule



If you started with J&J and are between 18 – 49 years old, you'll need 2 booster shots of either J&J or Pfizer. Your first booster must be 60 days after being fully vaccinated (e.g. 1 J&J shot). Your second booster is 90 days after your first booster. As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your 1st booster.

People who are 50 and older should have 4 shots. As of 30 January 2023, you can have a 5th jab 180 days after your last booster as an additional shot.

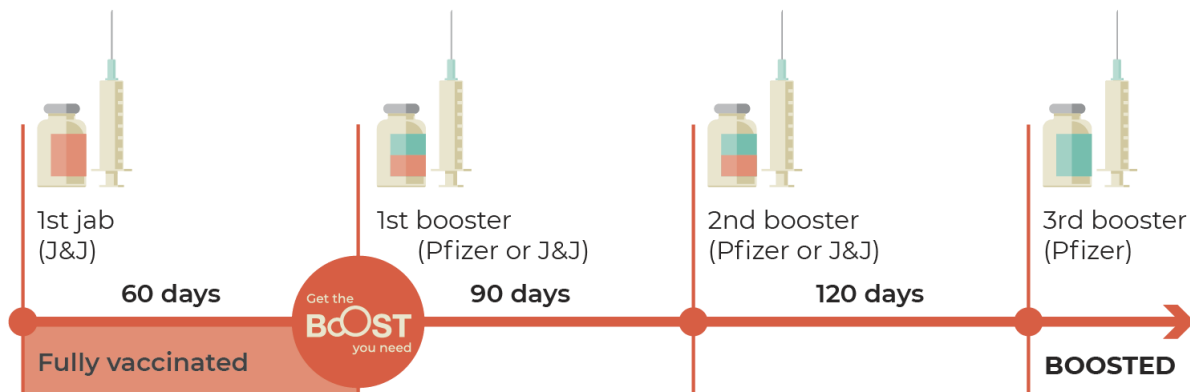
50+ Pfizer vaccination schedule



That means, if you started with Pfizer, you can have your first booster 90 days after being fully vaccinated (e.g. you've had 2 Pfizer shots), followed by a second booster shot 90 days after your first booster. Your booster shots can be either Pfizer or J&J, except for your last booster shot which must be Pfizer.

As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your 2nd booster.

50+ J&J vaccination schedule

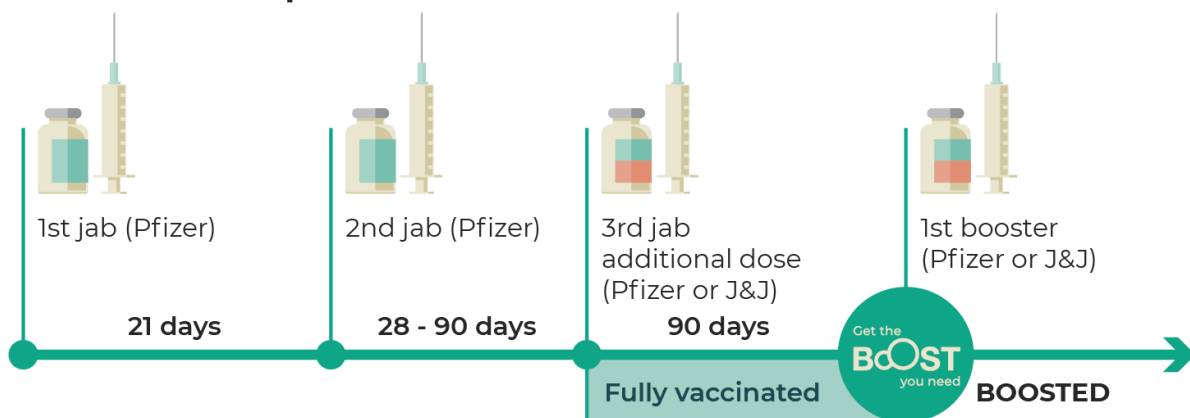


If you are 50 and older, and started with J&J, you'll need 3 booster shots. Your first booster is 60 days after being fully vaccinated (e.g. 1 J&J shot). Your second booster is 90 days after your first. And your third booster is 120 days after your second booster shot. Your boosters can be either J&J or Pfizer, except for your third booster which must be Pfizer.

As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your 3rd booster.

If you have a weakened immune system, you need four shots. As of 30 January 2023, you can have a 5th jab 180 days after your last booster as an additional shot.

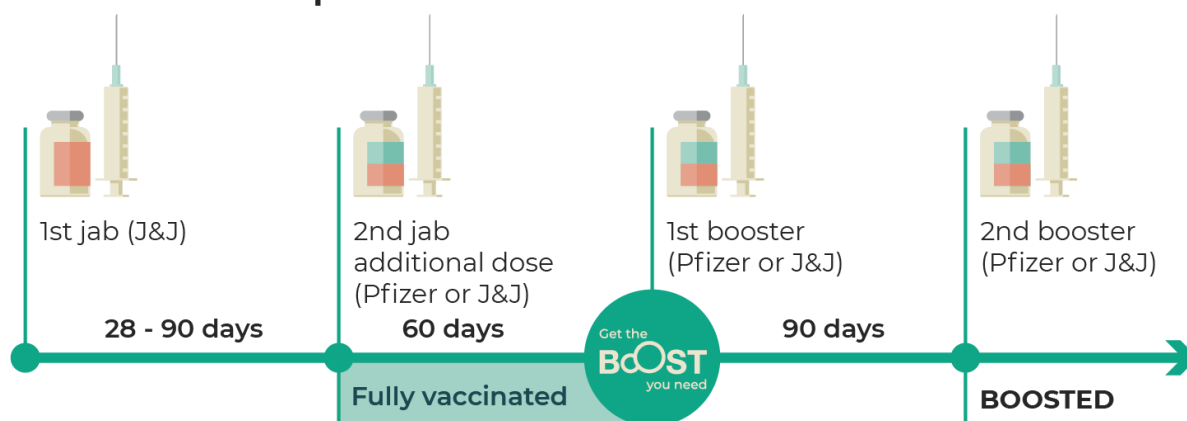
Immunocompromised Pfizer vaccination schedule



If you started with Pfizer, you must have your additional dose 28 – 120 days after your second Pfizer shot to be fully vaccinated. You can then have a booster 90 days after your additional dose. Your additional dose and booster shot can be either J&J or Pfizer.

As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your 1st booster.

Immunocompromised J&J vaccination schedule



If you started with J&J, you'll need an additional shot 28 – 120 days after your first J&J vaccine. This means you're fully vaccinated. You then need 2 booster shots. You can get your first booster shot 60 days after your additional dose, followed by a second booster shot 90 days after your first booster. Your booster shots and additional dose can be either Pfizer or J&J.

As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your 2nd booster.

Q. What are the side effects of the booster shot?

They're exactly the same as getting your original vaccine – although you can respond differently each time you receive a booster. Common side effects include tiredness, body aches and pains, low-grade fever, and pain where the vaccine went into your arm. But they are nothing to worry about and will usually go away after two to three days.

If you have any other side effects, you should report them on the MedSafety app (<https://medsafety.sahpra.org.za/>) and visit your doctor or clinic to get checked out.

Q. Can you “mix and match” vaccines? In other words, can you get Pfizer and J&J shots?

You can get a mixture of the J&J and Pfizer vaccines against COVID-19 in South Africa. You just have to be fully vaccinated with one, then ask for the other as a booster. However, if you are 50 and over, your last booster shot (e.g. your 3rd booster if you started with J&J, and your 2nd booster if you started with Pfizer) must only be Pfizer.

Q. I'm a healthcare worker; what do I need to know?

HealthWorkerConnect is for you! Just WhatsApp “vaccine” to 060 060 1111.

Q. Where can I get help and information?

Call the national helpline on 0800 029 999.

Q. Recently, the media talked about Pfizer not testing before making the vaccine available. Surely this makes it unsafe to take the Pfizer shot?

Social media users have circulated video clips of testimony by a Pfizer executive, supposedly admitting that the company and its partner, BioNTech, did not test whether their mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccine reduced virus transmission before they rolled it out.

To get emergency approval, companies needed to show that the vaccines were safe and prevented vaccinated people from getting ill. *They did not have to show that the vaccine would also prevent people from spreading the virus to others.*

Once the vaccines were on the market, however, independent researchers in multiple countries studied people who received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and showed that vaccination did reduce transmission of variants circulating at the time.

Evidence continued to build in 2021 that the mRNA-based vaccines (The Pfizer vaccine in South Africa) prevented infections and transmission of the virus, but they also demonstrated that protection against infection and transmission was starting to drop, especially when it came to some of the variants, like Omicron. But even Omicron does not escape vaccine protection against transmission completely.

And that is why it is still vital to ensure you remain fully vaccinated and boosted, so that you maximise your protection against both getting and transmitting COVID-19.

Q. Where can I get vaccinated?

You can find a list of your nearest vaccination centres here:

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/active-vaccination-sites/> or www.findmyjab.co.za or call the call centre on 0800 029 999. You don't need to pre-book or receive an SMS - just walk into your nearest vaccination centre. All you need is your ID.

Immunocompromised FAQs: booster shots

Q. What should I do if I have a chronic disease and experience serious side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine?

Serious side effects are very rare. Contact your healthcare provider if:

- the pain where you got the jab gets worse and not better after a day
- other side effects do not go away in a few days
- you are worried by pain in your chest or head, you feel faint or short of breath, or you are confused and struggling to think clearly

To report serious side effects (or bad reactions), visit any health facility, use the MedSafety app (<https://medsafety.sahpra.org.za/>) or call the toll-free hotline: 0800 029 999.

Q. I'm immunocompromised; do I need a referral from my nurse or doctor?

No. But do talk to them about any concerns you have.

Q. Why must I have an additional dose of the vaccine if I'm immunocompromised?

If you have a weakened immune system or because of underlying conditions, your risk of severe COVID-19 illness and hospitalisation is higher. It also means that you need an additional dose of the vaccine to be fully vaccinated.

Q. What is my vaccination schedule if I'm immunocompromised?

If you started with Pfizer, you need 1 additional dose after your two Pfizer shots to be fully vaccinated, followed by 1 booster shot.

You need to take your additional dose 28 – 120 days after your second Pfizer vaccine. Once you've had your additional dose (which can be either Pfizer or J&J), you can have 1 booster shot which can also be either Pfizer or J&J, 90 days afterwards.

If you started with J&J, you need 1 additional dose after your first J&J shot to be fully vaccinated, followed by 2 booster shots.

To be fully vaccinated, you'll need your additional dose 28 – 120 days after your first J&J vaccine. You then need 3 booster shots. You can get your first booster shot 60 days after your additional dose, followed by a second booster shot 90 days after your first booster. Your booster shots and additional dose can be either Pfizer or J&J.

Q. Can I receive the COVID-19 booster if I have diabetes?

Yes, they are safe for anyone with diabetes – even if you are taking medication for your diabetes, or are taking insulin.

Diabetes weakens your immune system, which makes you more vulnerable to infections. COVID-19 takes advantage of this weakness to get into your body and cause severe disease. So, keep taking any prescribed medications, manage your blood sugar well, and have your booster shot as soon as you can.

Q. Is it safe to have a COVID-19 booster if I have tuberculosis (TB)?

Yes, COVID-19 boosters are safe for people living with TB, and are extra important for maximum protection. TB weakens your immune system and often affects your lungs. As a result, people living with TB are more likely to catch COVID-19. Take it as soon as you can, and continue with your TB medication.

Q. Can I receive the COVID-19 booster if I am HIV-positive?

Yes, the COVID-19 boosters are safe if you are living with HIV, whether you are on medication or not. The COVID-19 booster will improve your immune system's ability to fight the COVID-19 virus, and lower your risk of death or severe disease if you get infected with COVID-19. Also, make sure that you keep taking your ARVs every day, as prescribed by your healthcare provider.

Q. Can I receive the COVID-19 booster if I have chronic lung disease or asthma?

Yes, COVID-19 vaccines and boosters are safe for people living with chronic lung disease and/or asthma.

Many people in South Africa have damaged lungs because of previous TB infection, working in mines, smoking, or breathing in smoke from fires. COVID-19 affects the lungs and can cause pneumonia, so people with damaged lungs are at greater risk of severe illness or death if they catch COVID-19.

That's why it is very important that people living with any lung disease have all the recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses, including the boosters.

Q. Should I get my booster shots if I have arthritis? Is it safe?

COVID-19 vaccines are safe for people living with arthritis. Some types of arthritis are caused by the immune system becoming overactive and attacking healthy parts of the body, such as our knees and wrists. Treatment for these conditions suppresses the immune system to prevent damage to healthy joints, which can make you vulnerable to severe illness if you catch COVID-19.

That's why it's very important that people living with arthritis have all the recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses, including the boosters.

Q. If I have high blood pressure, can I take the COVID-19 booster?

Yes, you can! The COVID-19 vaccines are safe if you have high blood pressure – whether you are taking medication for it or not.

High blood pressure increases your risk of stroke and other problems with your blood vessels, and these problems can also be complications from COVID-19. So, it is very important to have all the recommended COVID-19 vaccines, including the booster shots, and to keep managing your condition with your medication and the lifestyle changes recommended by your healthcare practitioner.

Q. Can I take a booster shot if I have heart disease?

Yes – the vaccines and boosters are safe for people who have heart disease.

People with existing heart disease have a higher risk of severe illness and death related to COVID-19, and COVID-19 can also increase the risk of developing heart disease. This is because COVID-19 can also lead to problems with blood vessels and blood clots.

The best way to lower your risk of severe COVID-19 is to have all the recommended doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, including the boosters, because this reduces the risk of severe illness if you catch COVID-19. If you are living with heart disease, taking your prescribed medicines for your condition is also very important.

Vaccine certificate FAQs

Q. How can I download my vaccine certificate?

First, make sure you have everything you need:

1. Your South African ID number or foreign passport number, or Asylum or Refugee number. (Note that this should be the same ID document number you presented when you were vaccinated.)
2. The cell phone with the number you used when you registered for vaccination.
3. Your vaccination code from the SMS you received after your vaccination.

Next, go to <https://vaccine.certificate.health.gov.za/> and follow the prompts, making sure you enter all the required details correctly. Then you can download it.

Q. What can I do if I have problems downloading my vaccine certificate?

If one of the fields entered is wrong, the system will return an error message including “details not found”. You can contact the toll-free COVID-19 public hotline: 0800 029 999 for assistance.

Q. Why must I download my vaccine certificate?

You may be required to provide proof of vaccination if you are travelling outside of South Africa, at your workplace, or even to gain entry to some events or buildings, so it’s useful to have with you.

Q. When should I download my vaccine certificate?

Download it straight after vaccination, so you have it handy, but also keep an eye out for any government communication. As local and international regulations change, sometimes you need an updated version. The Department of Health will advise the public on the availability of newer versions of the COVID-19 vaccination certificate as they become available. And you can download it more than once, so don’t worry if you lose it.

Q. Why does my certificate say Comirnaty® or Janssen® and not Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson?

Your vaccine certificate will show Comirnaty® if you had a Pfizer dose and Janssen® if you had a Johnson & Johnson dose. Comirnaty® and Janssen® are the official names for these vaccines and are internationally recognised.

Key messages for essential workers, people over 50 and people with compromised immune systems to vaccinate

Get the BOOST you need!

What?

We are encouraging all essential workers, people over 50, and people with compromised immune systems to get booster shots.

- **Essential workers**

- COVID-19 isn't over, and South Africa's essential workers are on the frontline. Get an additional layer of protection against possible future variants of COVID-19 by making sure you are up to date with your vaccinations and booster shots.
- If you are younger than 50, you need 3 jabs.
 - If you started with Pfizer, you need two Pfizer jabs to be fully vaccinated and 1 booster shot, 90 days after being fully vaccinated.
 - If you started with J&J, just the 1 shot means you're fully vaccinated, but you'll need 2 booster shots of either J&J or Pfizer. The first booster is 60 days after being fully vaccinated. Your second booster is 90 days after your first booster.
 - As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your last booster.
- If you are 50 or older, you need 4 jabs.
 - If you started with the Pfizer vaccine, you need two Pfizer jabs to be fully vaccinated, followed by 2 boosters. The first booster is 90 days after being fully vaccinated. The Second booster is 120 days after your first booster shot. Your boosters can be either J&J or Pfizer, except for your second booster which must be Pfizer.
 - If you started with J&J and you're 50 years or older, just the 1 shot means you're fully vaccinated, but you'll need 3 booster shots. Your first booster is 60 days after being fully vaccinated. Your second booster is 90 days after your first. And your third booster is 120 days after your second booster shot. Your boosters can be either J&J or Pfizer, except for your third booster which must be Pfizer.
 - As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your last booster.
- **People over 50 years of age**
 - If you're 50 or older, you have a higher risk of getting sick and being hospitalised from COVID-19. That's why it's important to make sure your vaccinations and booster shots are up to date. They will give you a strong layer of protection.
 - People who are 50 and older can have an additional booster shot.
 - You need 4 jabs. If you started with Pfizer, you need two Pfizer jabs to be fully vaccinated, followed by 2 boosters. The first booster is 90 days after being fully vaccinated. The Second booster is 120 days after your first booster shot. Your boosters can be either J&J or Pfizer, except for your second booster which must be Pfizer.
 - If you started with J&J, just the 1 shot means you're fully vaccinated, but you'll need 3 booster shots. Your first booster is 60 days after being fully vaccinated. Your second booster is 90 days after your first. And your third booster is 120 days after your second booster shot. Your boosters can be either J&J or Pfizer, except for your third booster which must be Pfizer.

- As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your last booster.
- **People who are immunocompromised**
 - If you have a weakened immune system because of underlying conditions, your risk of severe COVID-19 illness and hospitalisation is higher.
 - To maximise your protection, you need to have four shots – an additional dose to be fully vaccinated, and booster shot/s.
 - If you started with Pfizer, you must have your additional dose 28 – 120 days after your second Pfizer shot to be fully vaccinated. You can then have a booster 90 days after your additional dose. Your additional dose and booster shot can be either J&J or Pfizer.
 - If you started with J&J, you'll need an additional shot 28 – 120 days after your first J&J vaccine. This means you're fully vaccinated. You can get your first booster shot 60 days after your additional dose, followed by a second booster shot 90 days after your first booster. Your booster shots and additional dose can be either Pfizer or J&J.
 - As of 30 January 2023, you can have an additional booster shot of either Pfizer or J&J 180 days after your last booster.

Why?

- Immunity to COVID-19 – whether you get it from having had COVID-19, or from your vaccinations, decreases after several months. The booster will help to increase your immunity again.
- People who have been vaccinated are less likely to get severe illness, be hospitalised or die when getting COVID-19. It's not a risk worth taking.
- We're not yet at the end of the pandemic, and there is still good reason for all of us to get vaccinated and boosted to maximise our protection.
- Vaccination doesn't always stop infection, but it can help reduce your risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 and from getting Long COVID. But remember, your immunity decreases over time, so a booster will help to raise it again.

When?

- Depending on your age and if you have a chronic illness, there are different intervals between your primary dose and your boosters. Please Call 0800 029 999 to check when you're due or visit www.sacoronavirus.co.za.
- Make sure you've got an extra layer of protection before COVID-19 has a chance.
- If you're unsure, call the Call Centre on 0800 029 999.

How and where

- Just walk into your nearest vaccination centre. No pre-booking or SMS needed. But please bring your ID.
- You can find a list of your nearest vaccination centres here: <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/active-vaccination-sites/> or findmyjab.co.za

What if?

- The side effects of booster vaccines are similar to the side effects from a first vaccine. Common side effects include tiredness, body aches and pains, low-grade fever and pain at the injection site. These side effects usually resolve completely within 24-48 hours.
- Call 0800 029 999 or email info@vaccinesupport.org.za for more information on the booster shots.