

# Useful tips on the Covid-19 vaccine for people with dementia



The national COVID-19 vaccination is now being offered as a priority to individuals who are at highest risk of catching the infection and of suffering serious complications.

This includes people living with dementia and those who have certain conditions that increase their risk of becoming seriously ill.


The vaccine is not compulsory but is highly recommended. If someone you care for has been offered the vaccine and they or their family are unsure about having it, recommend they seek advice from their GP or nearest health care professional and look at trusted sources as found [here](#).

Dementia UK has also compiled some useful information and guidance for family and friends including frequently asked questions:

➔ [bit.ly/DementiaUKCovid19vaccine](https://bit.ly/DementiaUKCovid19vaccine)




## Key principles

**V** Visual aids can be helpful 


**A** Assess capacity and use 'best interests' if needed

**C** Choose your moment 

**C** Communicate clearly and offer reassurance

**I** Individualised approach 

**N** Never rush

**E** Engage family and relatives 

## Tips for explaining to patient and family

- Explain why the vaccine is being offered.
- Use short, clear sentences and repeat things if needed.
- Advise it is not compulsory but is **highly recommended**.

"The injection is to protect you from the Covid-19 virus"

"The injection won't give you the Covid-19 virus"

"I would like your permission to give you the vaccine"

The following questions and answers have been compiled to highlight some of the issues that may be faced by families and staff who are caring for people with dementia:

## Do you have any useful tips for giving someone the vaccination without causing undue distress?

- If the person has ever had a serious allergic reaction to medicines, vaccines or food, seek medical advice before giving the vaccine.
- Make sure you choose a time and place that suits the person, keeping noise and distraction to a minimum.
- Use short sentences, pause between them, and simple language to explain what needs to be done and why it is important.
- Give the person time to hear and ask you any questions.
- Visual prompt cards can be used to provide further explanation.
- Ensure good communication – explain what you are doing using short simple sentences, provide reassurance, try to remain calm, smile, hold their hand and remain positive when talking and offering support.
- If the person becomes distressed then stop and try again later – perhaps someone who they respond to well could try or you could use music that the person likes in the background to help them relax.
- Kneel or sit down so that you are at the same physical level as the person and make eye contact to make communication easier.
- Some people can get a sore arm after having the vaccine – giving paracetamol beforehand may reduce this.
- After the vaccine has been given, offer reassurance and explain any after-effects e.g. “Some people can get a sore arm, headache or fever after the injection”.
- Offer a drink afterwards, or do a favourite activity of theirs, or rest if they are feeling tired.

## What happens if someone with dementia is unable to consent to their vaccine?

- If someone with dementia is unable to consent to the vaccine, then consent must be obtained via a ‘best interest’ decision (which is compliant with the Mental Capacity Act 2005).
- A ‘best interest’ decision is when someone is unable to make a decision for themselves, so the decision may have to be made for them.
- Healthcare professionals need to consult family, friends, other professionals who know the person well, to find out what is in the person with dementia’s best interests.
- If a family member has registered Lasting Power of Attorney for Health and Welfare, they must be consulted about any health decisions, such as the vaccine, on their behalf.
- Ask the family what they already know about the person’s past wishes, choices or experiences of vaccinations; for example, do they usually have the annual flu vaccine or have they had any side effects in the past?
- If there are no family members involved then a best interests decision should be made by the care team.
- More information on consent and best interests can be found on the Dementia UK website at:

➔ [bit.ly/DementiaUKconsent](https://bit.ly/DementiaUKconsent)

