

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 (<https://www.dementiauk.org/giving-covid-19-vaccine-to-someone-with-dementia/>).

There are a few principles which may be helpful.

- V** Visual aids can be helpful
- A** Assess capacity to consent, 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

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?

- 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.
- Make eye contact and come down to their eye level to make communication easier.

- 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.

How should I explain to someone with dementia and/or their families about the COVID 19 vaccination?

- Explain to both the person and their family why the vaccine is being offered i.e. to reduce their risk of becoming seriously ill from the virus COVID 19.
- Advise that the vaccination is not compulsory but is highly recommended.
- Explain it is different to the seasonal flu vaccine and people need to have 2 doses for it to be effective – usually 21 days apart.
- Use short sentences and repeat things if needed to help someone understand.
- Some of the below statements may be helpful to support a person with dementia and help them feel more comfortable about having the vaccine:

“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”

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 Wellbeing, 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: <https://www.dementiauk.org/get-support/diagnosis-and-next-steps/changes-in-care/capacity-decision-making/>