

COVID-19 UPDATES

COVID-19 variants detected in the Philippines

Variant of Concern (country where first detected)	Total Characteristic Mutations	Mutations in the S gene receptor binding domain	Possible functional changes
D614G (China)			
B.1.1.7 (United Kingdom)	18	N501Y	• More efficient transmission
B.1.351 (South Africa)	8	N501Y, E484K, K417N	• Reduced antibody binding and immune protection
P.1 (Brazil)	21	N501Y, E484K	• Reduced vaccine efficacy against B.1.351 and P.1

Graphic by Jane Cha, The Jackson Laboratory.

All 3 VOCs have the N501Y mutation, which is linked to increased transmissibility. The **B.1.1.7** variant is about 70% more infectious while the **B.1.351** variant is anywhere from 0-50% more infectious. Both **B.1.351** and **P.1** variants have the mutation E484K, which may affect vaccine efficacy.

While **P.3** variant found in the Philippines also contains these two mutations, health officials said that it is still not identified as a variant of concern as current available data are insufficient to conclude whether the variant will have significant public health implications. DOH reported 98 cases of this virus type, whose first cases were detected in Central Visayas.

“Vaccines are a critical new tool in the battle against COVID-19.”

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines work by training and preparing the body's natural defenses – the immune system - to recognize and fight off the viruses and bacteria they target. After vaccination, if the body is later exposed to those disease causing germs, the body is immediately ready to destroy them, preventing illness.

How do vaccines differ?

Vaccines differ in their composition and how they trigger the immune response to create antibodies. These antibodies protect the body from microorganisms and serve as protection once a person gets infected with disease. Vaccines can be inactivated, weakened, or killed copies of the whole or part of the virus or bacteria, or genetic product (like mRNA vaccines) that creates protein copies without causing disease.

What are possible side effects of vaccination?

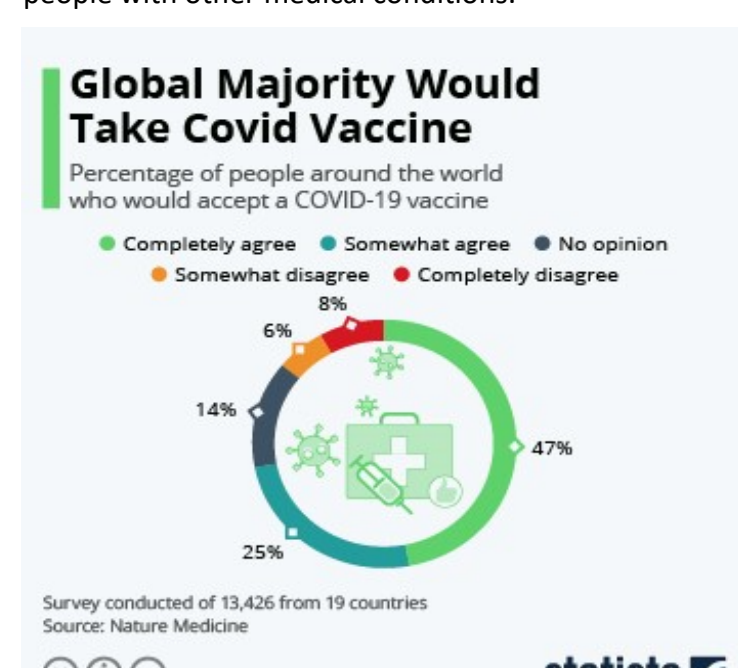
The possible side effects of vaccine include pain, redness, itchiness or swelling at the injection site (which may last a few hours); fever; feeling of weakness or fatigue; headache; dizziness; diarrhea or nausea. Consult the nearest healthcare professional if you experience any of these.

Is vaccination mandatory?

No, vaccination is not mandatory. But medical professionals and the government highly encourage the public to get vaccinated and be protected against preventable disease.

What are the benefits of getting vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines?

The COVID-19 vaccines produce protection against the disease, as a result of developing an immune response to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Developing immunity through vaccination means there is a reduced risk of developing the illness and its consequences. This immunity helps you fight the virus if exposed. Getting vaccinated may also protect people around you, because if you are protected from getting infected and from disease, you are less likely to infect someone else. This is particularly important to protect people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, such as healthcare workers, older or elderly adults, and people with other medical conditions.



Are there risks for complications when given the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, like all other vaccines, there are risks of complications but SEVERE OR LIFE-THREATENING REACTIONS are EXTREMELY RARE. The benefit of protection against severe COVID-19 is greater than the risk. Anyone who will get the vaccine will be properly evaluated and closely monitored by health professionals to further minimize any risk.

Who should be excluded from receiving COVID-19 vaccines?

Medical professionals can best advise individuals on whether or not they should receive a COVID-19 vaccine. However, based on available evidence, people with the following health conditions should generally be excluded from COVID-19 vaccination in order to avoid possible adverse effects:

- If you have a history of severe allergic reactions to any ingredients of the COVID-19 vaccine
- If you are currently sick or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, though you can get vaccinated once your primary symptoms have resolved

Further research is needed to determine the safety and efficacy of different COVID-19 vaccines in certain population groups. In addition to the general recommendations above, each vaccine may have specific considerations for specific populations and health conditions.

Is it safe for pregnant women, those planning to become pregnant, and breastfeeding mothers to receive COVID-19 vaccines?

Based on what we know about these vaccines, there is no any specific reason to believe there will be risks that would outweigh the benefits of vaccination for pregnant women. While pregnancy puts women at higher risk of severe COVID-19, very little data are available to assess vaccine safety in pregnancy.

For this reason, those pregnant women at high risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (e.g. health workers) or who have comorbidities which add to their risk of severe disease may be vaccinated in consultation with their health care provider.

It is not yet clear whether COVID-19 vaccines can be excreted through breastfeeding. To determine the best course of action, the developmental and health benefits of breastfeeding should be considered along with the mother's clinical need for immunization against COVID-19. WHO does not recommend discontinuing breastfeeding after vaccination.

STAY SAFE: Protect yourself and others from COVID-19



With the surge in COVID-19 cases in our communities, let's continue to keep our guards up and maintain minimum standard health protocols. Stay safe by taking some simple precautions, such as physical distancing, wearing a mask and face shield, keeping rooms well-ventilated, avoiding crowds or staying at home if possible, cleaning your hands, coughing into bent elbow or tissue, avoiding eating together in groups, etc. Check your local advice where you live and work.



Sources: Department of Health (DOH); World Health Organization (WHO); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)