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## The future of COVID-19 vaccinations

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many things have changed in the UK. COVID-19 has mutated and more recent variants are linked with fewer hospital admissions. Many of us have now had three or four vaccinations to reduce our risk of serious illness from COVID-19, and many have been infected with the virus and recovered. What does this mean for the future of COVID-19 vaccinations? And might we reach a point where protective measures are no longer necessary?

### A different disease

COVID-19 remains a constantly evolving situation, and nothing is certain. However, using existing data, scientists are now able to predict the most likely outcomes.

COVID-19 isn't likely to disappear anytime soon. But with its effects reduced by a combination of vaccination, immunity from being infected, and the overall less intense symptoms of the Omicron variant<sup>1</sup>, how we deal with it may change significantly in the future.

Ian Jones, professor of virology from Reading University, explains: "The disease today is very different from how it was when the virus first broke out.

"This is partly because most people now have some immunity from antibodies - disease-fighting proteins developed by our bodies [during either vaccination or a previous infection](#) - but also because the current strain of virus is less likely to cause severe disease in the general population."

## Vaccination and infection

In the UK, most of us have been vaccinated, have contracted COVID-19, or both<sup>2</sup>, and therefore are likely to have some [residual immunity to the virus](#). This means that even if we are exposed to COVID-19, we are less likely to contract it than someone with no antibodies and, if we do succumb to infection, are likely to present with milder symptoms.

"The COVID-19 vaccinations haven't been around long enough for us to know how long immunity will last," explains Professor Jones. "There's likely to be a slow decline in protection, but you will probably have some beneficial immunity one or even two years out."

## Will we need booster vaccines?

Earlier in the pandemic, healthy members of the public were advised to get vaccinated in order to protect others. However, Professor Jones predicts that future COVID-19 booster jabs are likely to be aimed at the most vulnerable<sup>3</sup> - including those over 75, care home residents, and people with compromised immune systems - and offered on a voluntary basis, much like the current [flu jab](#).

"The question of whether you would want to boost existing immunity with an additional vaccine really depends on the strength of the virus and how much it's circulating. There won't be a call for vaccine passports or anything like that - it will be purely voluntary."

## An evolving situation

When it comes to science and disease, there are no certainties. However, the fact that viruses do tend to evolve is currently working in our favour with COVID-19, as mutations such as [Omicron](#) have proven less of a risk to our health than previous variants such as Delta. However, it's worth remembering that mutations can also make viruses more dangerous.

In the case of COVID-19, many scientists believe that the virus will continue to weaken. That said, when it comes to disease, things are not always straightforward - there are no guarantees.

# The future of the vaccination

In the coming years, the COVID-19 booster is likely to be offered mainly to those who are considered particularly vulnerable to the virus, as is the case with the current flu vaccination.

If COVID-19 continues to weaken, it may be that in future years, vaccination becomes completely unnecessary for all groups.

While it remains important to keep up to date with any developments, when it comes to COVID-19, the future is definitely looking brighter.

## Further reading

1. [Looi: How are COVID-19 symptoms changing?](#)
2. [Office for National Statistics: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest insights.](#)
3. [GOV.UK: Most vulnerable to be offered spring COVID-19 booster.](#)

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