

Frequently asked questions about Coronavirus Vaccinations and Warfarin

21st January 2021

This information is regularly reviewed and amended to reflect the collective advice and opinion of the British government, Public Health England and expert UK bodies and organisations who have an interest in anticoagulation within the UK.

The advice below regarding coronavirus vaccinations and warfarin also applies to people taking acenocoumarol (Sinthrome®).

Is the vaccine safe for people taking warfarin?

Like most vaccines, the coronavirus vaccine is injected into the muscle of your upper arm. As with any injection, there is some risk of bleeding. Injections into your muscle may bleed a little more than injections that are given under the skin, but less than those that are given into a vein.

If you are taking Warfarin (or any other anticoagulant), the bleeding may take a little longer to stop and you may get more bruising on your upper arm.

The risk of a problem at the injection site following the coronavirus vaccine is probably about the same as that of the flu vaccination many of you have already had this winter.

To further reduce the risks, Public Health England and the Department of Health have said that you can have the vaccine if your anticoagulant treatment is stable. That generally means that you will have been taking the same dose for a while, that your INR checks are up to date and that your latest INR level was in the right range.

It is important that you take your Yellow Book with you to your vaccination appointment for several reasons:

- It contains the information about your warfarin dose, your latest INR level and the date of your next planned INR check.
- It should also contain our contact details in case the vaccination centre wants to contact us ahead of your vaccination. This may be more likely if your usual INR range is over 3.0 or you take other medication such as aspirin or clopidogrel alongside warfarin as these also affect how easily your blood clots.
- The healthcare professional giving you the vaccine may use a finer needle and apply pressure for longer afterwards to reduce the risk of large bruises or any bleeding because they are aware that you are taking an anticoagulant.

In a similar way to the flu jab being well tolerated by most warfarin patients we do not anticipate the coronavirus vaccination causing dangerously high INR readings, but this information continues to be gathered as the vaccination program continues.

After receiving the vaccination, you may experience a small amount of bleeding or a small bruise or blood blister at the injection site. If this happens please, try not worry but monitor the size and shape and feel free to call us if you remain concerned. If it does not get better after a few days, please get in touch so we can decide if we need to do an INR test.

Continue to let us know about any bruising or bleeding anywhere else in the usual way.

The vaccination centre may recommend you call us to discuss when to have your next INR check if you are not due to see us for many weeks following your vaccination. We can make this individual decision with you when you call. If they do not tell you to contact us, you do not need to call. Please keep our telephone lines available for those who need to give us new information or have questions about their care.

If National Advice changes, we will update you either via phone call, text message or when you next have your INR appointment.

Please make sure we always have up to date contact details for you. The fastest way we can communicate is via text message if you have shared a mobile number with us to contact you on.

My INR range is 2.0-3.0 but my most recent reading was over 3.0. Can I still have the vaccine?

The National Guidelines suggest your INR should be within your target range. For many people this is a range of 2.0 to 3.0. However, it is important to remember that some people have a higher range of 3.0-4.0, and these people are still recommended to receive the vaccine if their INR is 4.0 or less.

The guidelines for many minor medical procedures such as small skin surgery and dental extractions have an upper acceptable INR of 4.0 so in most cases it should be fine to have the vaccine if your reading is 4.0 or less.

If your reading is over 4.0, we will already have adjusted your warfarin dose and be seeing you sooner for a repeat INR appointment. Please let the vaccination centre know when you are next due your INR test and they will most likely arrange for your vaccination just after this appointment.

What happens at the vaccination centre?

Show the healthcare professional giving you the vaccine your Yellow Book so that:

- They can check the information about your dose, your latest INR level and the date of your next planned INR check.
- They can obtain our contact details if they want to contact us ahead of your vaccination. This may be more likely if your usual INR range is over 3.0 or you take other medication such as aspirin or clopidogrel alongside warfarin as these also affect how easily your blood clots.
- They can use a finer needle and apply pressure for longer afterwards to reduce the risk of large bruises or any bleeding because you are taking an anticoagulant.

The vaccination centre may recommend you call us to discuss when to have your next INR check if you are not due to see us for many weeks following your vaccination. We can make this individual decision with you when you call.

If they do not tell you to contact us, you do not need to call. Please keep our telephone lines available for those who need to give us new information or have questions about their care.

Do I need an INR test before my vaccination?

Public Health England and the Department of Health have said that you can have the vaccine if your anticoagulant treatment is stable. That generally means that you will have been taking the same dose for a while, that your INR checks are up to date and that your latest INR level was in the right range.

The National Guidelines suggest your INR should be within your target range. For many people this is a range of 2.0 to 3.0. However, it is important to remember that some people have a higher range of 3.0-4.0, and these people are still recommended to receive the vaccine if their INR is 4.0 or less.

The guidelines for many minor medical procedures such as small skin surgery and dental extractions have an upper acceptable INR of 4.0 so in most cases it should be fine to have the vaccine if your reading is 4.0 or less.

If your last INR was within your target range, you do not need an INR test before your coronavirus vaccination.

If your last INR was higher than your target range but less than 4.0, your vaccination can go ahead in most cases. However, the vaccination centre will make this decision on an individual basis. Most patients will still receive their vaccination as planned. But some will be asked to have an INR test before their vaccination. This is most likely if your INR is often high out of range.

If your reading is over 4.0, we will have already adjusted your warfarin dose and be seeing you soon for a repeat INR appointment. Please let the vaccination centre know when you are next due your INR test and they will most likely arrange for your vaccination just after this appointment.

Do I need an INR test after my vaccination?

An extra INR check after your vaccination is not needed in most cases.

Do not adjust your warfarin dose – continue with your usual dose as planned and let us know that you have had the coronavirus vaccine when you see us at your next appointment.

The vaccination centre may recommend you call us to discuss when to have your next INR check if you are not due to see us for many weeks following your vaccination. We can make this individual decision with you when you call.

If they do not tell you to contact us, you do not need to call. Please keep our telephone lines available for those who need to give us new information or have questions about their care.

In a similar way to the flu jab being well tolerated by most warfarin patients we do not anticipate the coronavirus vaccination causing dangerously high INR readings, but this information continues to be gathered as the vaccination program continues.

After receiving the vaccination, you may experience a small amount of bleeding or a small bruise or blood blister at the injection site. If this happens please, try not worry but monitor the size and shape and feel free to call us if you remain concerned. If it does not get better after a few days please get in touch so we can decide if we need to do an INR test.

Continue to let us know about any bruising or bleeding anywhere else in the usual way.

What do I do if I think the vaccination has affected my warfarin?

Whilst no problems are anticipated, the NHS and MHRA (who licence the vaccines) are monitoring for any unexpected side effects of all the coronavirus vaccines.

In a similar way to the flu jab being well tolerated by most warfarin patients we do not anticipate the coronavirus vaccination causing dangerously high INR readings, but this information continues to be gathered as the vaccination programme continues. If any concerns arise that a vaccination has caused an unexpected effect on an INR, we will report this via the MHRA Yellow Card Scheme to support the national NHS data monitoring programme.

After receiving the vaccination, you may experience a small amount of bleeding or a small bruise or blood blister at the injection site.

If this happens please, try not worry. Please monitor the size and shape of the bruising and feel free to call us if you remain concerned. If it does not get better after a few days, please get in touch so we can decide if we need to do an INR test.

Continue to let us know about any bruising or bleeding anywhere else in the usual way.

Is there anything else I should do?

Continue with your usual warfarin (or acenocoumarol) dose as planned and let us know that you have had the coronavirus vaccine when you see us at your next appointment.

Continue to telephone us before your next scheduled appointment if any changes that could affect your warfarin level occur. That is, you:

- have symptoms that might be coronavirus (COVID-19)
- are Self-Isolating because you have been in contact with someone else who has coronavirus...
- have not been eating (or are suddenly eating or drinking much less than usual) for 2 days or more...
- have a high temperature or fever for 2 days or more...
- have had diarrhoea, vomiting, or both for 2 days or more...
- start a new medicine, especially antibiotics, steroids, or miconazole oral gel...
- stop a medicine or the dose is changed...
- are discharged from hospital. This information can take some time to reach us via NHS systems.
- are having a medical procedure carried out before the next clinic visit...
- start dieting...
- have recently reduced or increased your alcohol intake...
- have missed any doses or may have taken the wrong dose...

You can contact us by telephoning 0191 518 1564 or 0800 681 6518.

Keep your vaccination card and yellow book together so both INR team and Vaccination team have all the information they need in the coming weeks and months.

Please continue to socially distance and wear a face mask when meeting our clinicians. The vaccine will help to protect you from the virus, but it is still unknown how much it stops you passing the virus on to others. Our team continue to look after many others who have not yet received the vaccine and continue to do all they can to keep everyone safe. Your help with this is much appreciated.

Is there anything I should do differently before or after my second vaccination?

No, you do not need to do anything different. Please follow the same advice above as for your first vaccine.

References

British Heart Foundation (2021) Is the vaccine safe for people taking blood thinners like warfarin or other anticoagulants? <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/heart-matters-magazine/news/coronavirus-and-your-health/coronavirus-vaccine-your-questions-answered#warfarin> (Published 19th January 2021)

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Hunt BE (2020) COVID-19 vaccination – this is a green light for anticoagulated patients to receive it. *British Medical Journal* 371 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m4759> (Published 09 December 2020)

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Public Health England (2020) COVID-19: the green book, chapter 14a <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a> (last updated 31st December 2020).