

Malawi Government Ministry of Health



A COVID-19 Community Engagement Handbook for Community Health Volunteers and Community Leaders in Malawi









Working with Communities

Who is this Booklet for?

- Community health committees
- Health Center Management Committees
- Community Health Action Groups
- Local Leaders

How to use this Flip-chart

Read thoroughly and understand the content before engaging communities on COVID-19:

- The flip chart has pictures and messages unpacking the pictures
- During engagement with community members, expose the pictures to the community members while you look at text on the page behind it.
- Ask questions relating to what community members can see in the pictures

- Ask the individual/s about what they already know about the topic, then provide more information
- After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue e.g. ensuring they wear a mask. Help them to explore how they can address challenges that prevent them from doing the action
- Wrap-up the session by focusing on the text that unpacks what people see in the picture
- Remember that you are not supposed to use all the cards on a single meeting/session. You can plan to meet again and continue on other topics

Who is most at risk to COVID-19?

Gender, age, occupation, behavior, health problems and more are some of the factors that can put people at increased risk to COVID-19.

Women, for instance, often have greater responsibility to care for family and community members who fall sick, putting them at greater risk of getting diseases, including COVID-19.

The risk factors have been explored in detail in the subsequent sections.

Engaging Communities and taking action:

- Disseminating health information is a pillar for preventing diseases such as COVID-19
- Community Health Volunteers and leaders should engage communities in line with the COVID-19 prevention guidelines
- Develop a plan of action for COVID-19 solutions with the people in your community

Roles of Stakeholders in COVID-19 Response

Roles of Chiefs, Village Headmen, Block Leaders, Cultural Custodians

- Work with everyone in the community
- Conduct community awareness based on the COVID-19 vaccine messages shared by the Ministry of Health
- Ensure compliance of government guidance on COVID-19 preventive measures in addition to COVID-19 Vaccine
- Monitor that those within the community who are supposed to be vaccinated are receiving the services
- Bring together multiple actors and/or stakeholders to share COVID-19 vaccine information and avoid duplication or possible message conflict
- Should access/utilize the COVID-19 vaccine IEC/message package provided through their HSAs
- Support CHWs in rumour management and discourage stigma and discrimination
- Establish/set by-laws to prohibit negative cultural practices on COVID-19 vaccine.

Roles of CSO, NGOs, CBOs, FBOs

- Partner mapping, training and coordination to minimise duplication of efforts in the delivery of COVID-19 vaccine
- Raising awareness and risk communication on COVID-19 vaccine
- Disseminating technical guidance as per MOH guidelines on COVID-19 vaccine
- Conduct orientation of volunteers, chiefs and community groups on COVID-19 vaccine
- Ensure equality and non-discrimination in accessing COVID-19 vaccine
- Ensure communities have access to health services through accountability mechanisms and remedies in

- situations where their rights have been, or are at risk of being, breached
- Work with Government institutions to ensure key rights that are often implicated in public health emergencies include the right to health, the right to privacy and confidentiality
- Support data management including compiling of community level reports
- Facilitate mobilisation of resources for the smooth implementation of the COVID-19 vaccine program
- Support the HSAs to identify at eligible members of the community

Roles of Political Leaders (MPS and Councillors and political structures)

- Ensure government policy and action allow for the direct and meaningful participation of communities on issues regarding COVID-19 Vaccine;
- Support the COVID-19 vaccine program preparedness and planning to operationalize the national plan at community level;
- Encourage all preventive measures are adhered to during administration of COVID-19 vaccine:
- Lobby and mobilize financial and material resources to support the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine program.

Roles of Community Council & Health Structures including mother care groups, Youth groups, Vulnerable population.

- Support community awareness on COVID-19 Vaccine
- Establish a two-way dialogue, which includes giving time

to communities to explain their fears, ask questions, and have their questions answered with the support of his/her HSA or CHW regarding COVID-19 Vaccine

- Engage with all people who are directly in contact daily with the people targeted with COVID-19 Vaccine messages
- Support the HSAs to identify at eligible members of the community
- Support HSAs at vaccination sites
- Work with HSAs and CHWs during household and community level activities
- Support in compiling reports

Roles of general community members

- Communication of the COVID-19 vaccine messages
- Ensure adherence to COVID-19 Vaccine messages from the MOH
- Follow all public health interventions being raised in addition to the COVID-19 vaccine program:
 - o Frequent hand washing with soap and clean water
 - o Use of hand sanitizers
 - o Ensure physical distancing practices among workers and clients
 - o Ensure that clients practice all recommended prevention and control
 - o Seek medical care as advised
 - o Follow funeral and burial precautions as advised by their CHWs and community leaders
 - o Be monitors for COVID-19 suspects
 - o Support quarantine or isolation of suspects
 - Assist in COVID-19 activities to support the local leaders

What is COVID-19?

Facilitator's guiding points

- Expose the pictures to the community members while you look at text on the page behind it.
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COVID-19 is a disease that affects the respiratory system with symptoms such as fever and cough and can rapidly spread from one person to another. This condition can lead to serious illness and even death.

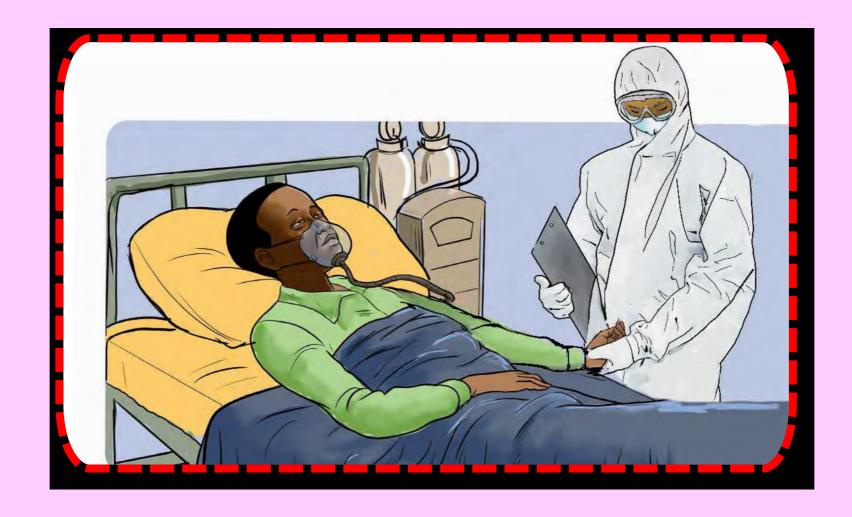
The first cases of COVID-19 were found in December 2019 and the disease has spread across the world since then including Malawi. COVID-19 is caused by a coronavirus.

• COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease which spreads through body fluids from the mouth or nose.

- People of any age, nationality, religion, or family may be infected.
- COVID-19 has symptoms such as fever, cough, headache, shortness of breath / difficulty in breathing and can cause pneumonia and death.
- People recover from COVID-19 on their own but some may require hospitalization

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

- What are the organs most affected by COVID-19?
- What are the signs and symptoms of COVID-19?



Learn About COVID-19



How Does COVID-19 Spread?

Facilitator's guiding points

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Coronaviruses are found in fluids that come out of the nose or mouth such as:

- 1. Saliva
- 2. Mucus
- 3. Sputum

Question: Can COVID-19 be spread through sweat?

No COVID-19 cannot be spread through sweat

 The virus enters a person's body through the mouth, nose and eyes when an infected person coughs, breathes, sneezes, talks or sings in close contact with others.

- The virus also enters the body through the mouth, nose or eyes when a person touches the face without washing their hands with soap and water.
- The Virus can also be spread after touching someone or surfaces which are infected
- Coronaviruses can be spread through clothing or equipment that has been infected by an infected person

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

- How is COVID-19 spread between people?
- How can people reduce the risk of getting COVID-19?
- Are there certain settings when COVID-19 can be spread more easily?



How Does COVID-19 Spread?



What are the Symptoms of COVID-19?

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The symptoms are:

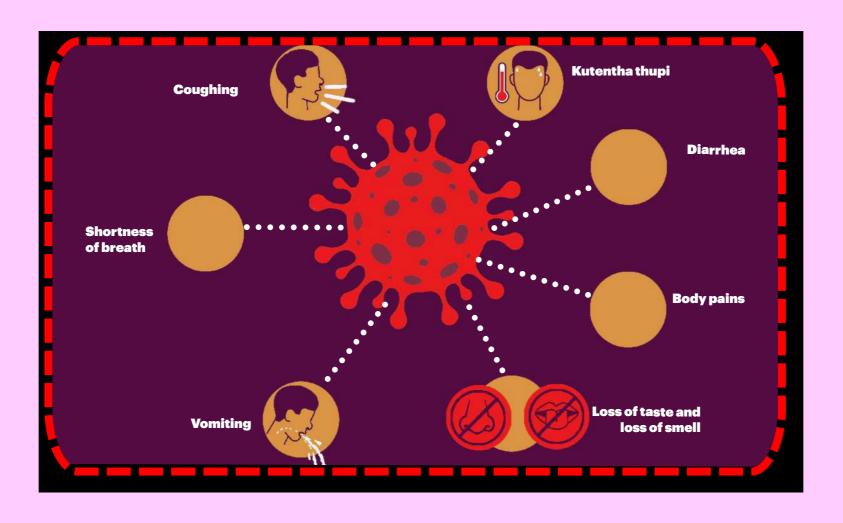
- High Body temperature
- Coughing
- Breathlessness
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of taste

- Loss of smell
- Some may have diarrhea or vomiting

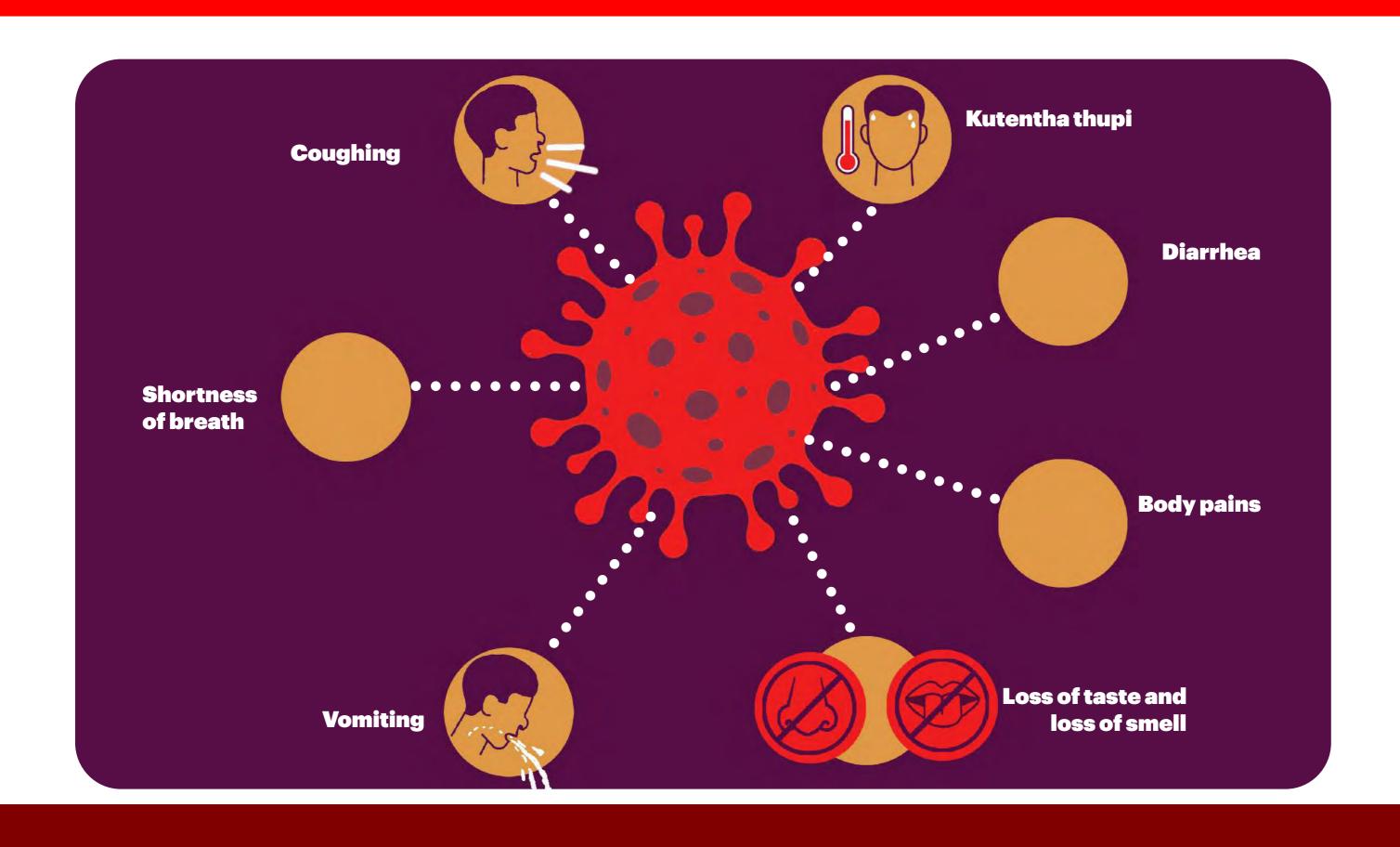
If you are experiencing any of these symptoms go to your nearest health center or call toll free line 929

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

- What are some of the common symptoms of COVID-19?
- What should people do when they have COVID-19 symptoms?



What are the Symptoms of COVID-19?



What puts people at risk of contracting Coronavirus?

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What puts people at risk of contracting Coronavirus?

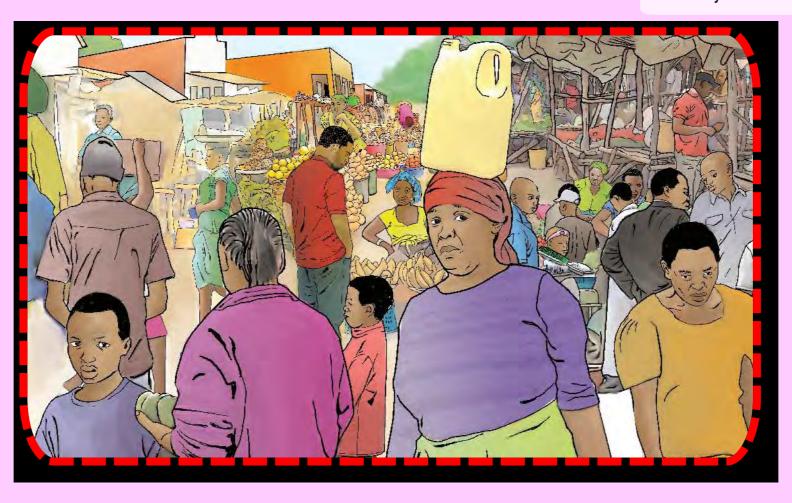
Lack of social distancing

- Being in close contact to someone with COVID-19
- Not wearing a mask in public places
- Failure to maintain a distance of at least one meter apart in public places including:
- 1. Prisons
- 2. Markets
- 3. Shopping malls, grocery stores, etc.
- 4. Schools
- 5. Hospitals
- 6. Gatherings such as weddings

- 7. During travel e.g. on a trip by bus
- 8. Banks
- 9. Video theaters
- 10. Restaurants
- Moving to or from areas where the disease is most prevalent
- Caring for patients without protective equipment
- Lack of hygiene
- Having pre-existing/underlying conditions

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

- How do you see yourself at risk of getting COVID-19?
- How do you fear the effects of COVID-19 on yourself, family and community?



What puts people at risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus?



Who is most at risk to COVID-19?

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Everyone is at risk of COVID-19. However, some groups are at high risk of serious illness and death, such as:

- People who have not received the COVID-19 vaccine
- People with a weakened immune system such as those with Cancer, HIV, TB and others.
- Older people over 60 years.
- People with diseases such as heart, liver, lungs, kidneys and diabetes.
- Pregnant women.

When a person is a little sick they can get help at home, but if the problem gets worse they are treated in a hospital.

Remember, most COVID-19 patients' recover and get rid of the COVID-19 virus in their body.

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

 Who are at higher risk of developing serious illness from COVID-19?



Who is most at risk of COVID?



How do we prevent COVID-19?

Facilitator's guiding points

- Expose the pictures to the community members while you look at text on the page behind it.
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Encourage all people to observe the following guidelines for preventing COVID-19:

- Get the COVID-19 vaccine and encourage family and friends to get vaccinated.
- Wear masks correctly when in public Mask should cover mouth and nose.
- Maintain a distance of one meter or more with others

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or apply a sanitizer.
- cough into your arm to cover your mouth.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Avoid overcrowding.
- Avoid shaking hands.
- Notify healthcare provider as soon as you notice any signs of COVID-19.
- We should not hide if someone is suffering from COVID-19. Notify health care providers immediately and keep patients in isolation until medical personnel arrive.

Note to the facilitator: Make sure you talk to people about the challenges they may face while following the prevention and control measures of COVID-19 and how they can address them. We all have a responsibility to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

Keep in mind that people can have COVID-19 but not show any symptoms even though they can spread the disease.

There are COVID-19 prevention strategies that everyone should follow individually such as wearing masks, staying one meter apart, frequent hand washing with soap, avoiding social situations and receiving vaccinations. There are also other prevention measures that community members can take to prevent COVID-19 in the community. Health committees should work with community health volunteers, leaders and community members to discuss ways to improve their community and what action can be taken by different communities to address the epidemic.

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

• What are some of the ways to prevent COVID-19?



How do we prevent COVID-19?



What is COVID-19 Vaccine?

Facilitator's guiding points

- Expose the pictures to the community members while you look at text on the page behind it.
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A Vaccine is a simple, safe, and effective way of protecting people against harmful diseases, before they come into contact with them. Thus the COVID-19 vaccine protects people against COVID-19 infections by producing antibodies against Coronavirus.

How does the COVID-19 vaccine protect against the disease?

The COVID-19 vaccine boosts the body's immune system. With the COVID-19 vaccine, the risk of contracting the disease if the virus enters the body is reduced. However, some people can still get the disease but they may not get very sick.

How is the COVID-19 vaccine given?

The vaccine is injected into the arm. Some vaccines are administered twice for complete protection.

The time period between doses will depend on which vaccine is received. Johnson and Johnson only requires 1 dose.

Where is the COVID-19 vaccine given?

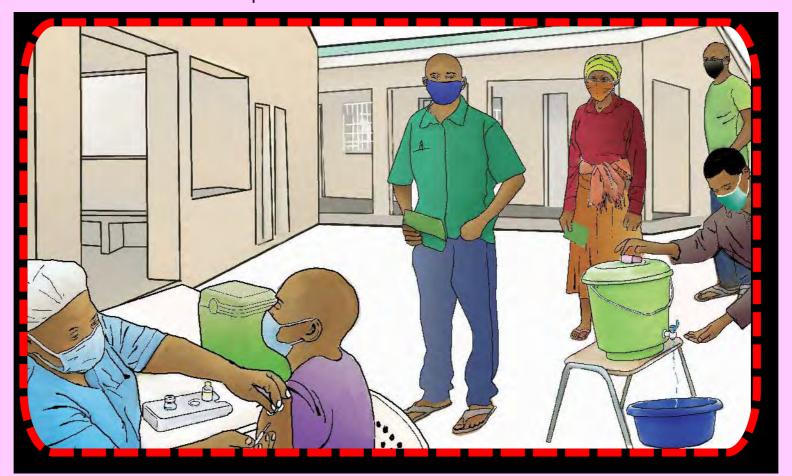
The vaccine is offered in public and missions hospitals, and other specialized facilities.

What are the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccination reduces the risk of serious illness if a person is infected with the Coronavirus. Getting COVID-19 vaccine is a powerful way to protect yourself, your family and your community from the virus. The more people who are vaccinated, the safer they will be.

Note: The COVID-19 vaccine is not a cure but only helps to prevent severe illness.

- After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.
- How willing are you to get COVID-19 vaccine?
- How do you think are people willing to get COVID-19 vaccine?



What is COVID-19 Vaccine?



Is it important to follow other COVID-19 prevention methods after receiving COVID-19 vaccine?

Facilitator's guiding points

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- Wrap-up the session by focusing on the text that unpacks what people see in the picture

Continue to follow COVID-19 prevention strategies, such as:

- Wear masks, covering your nose and mouth, every time you are in gatherings
- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Maintain at least 1-meter distance from others in public places.

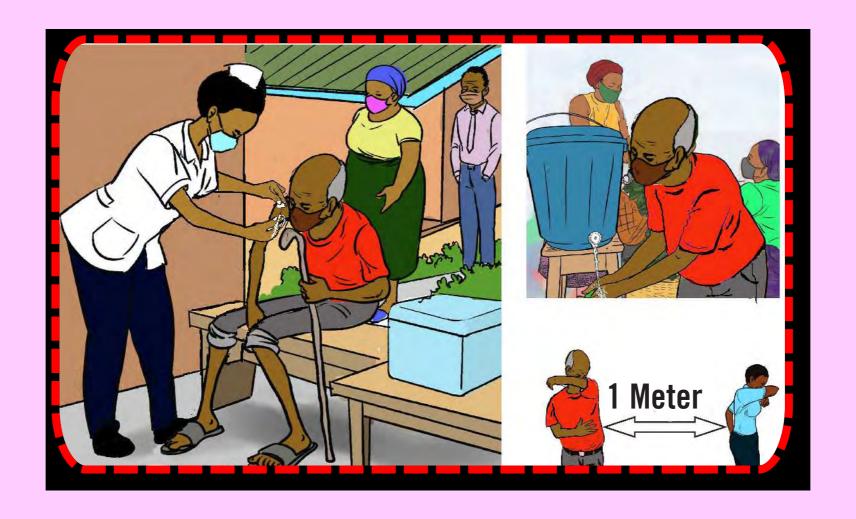
Why should a person continue to follow COVID-19 prevention even after injecting the COVID-19 vaccine?

Frequent hand washing with soap and water kills the

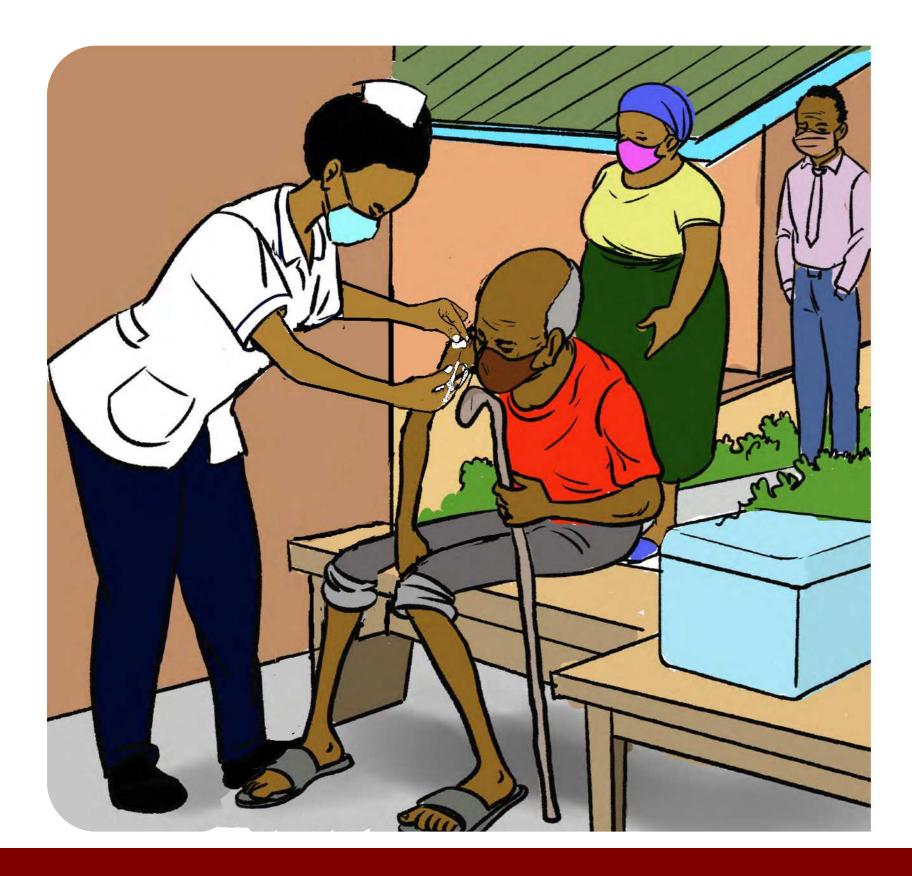
coronavirus, and maintaining social distance as well as wearing masks prevents coronavirus spread, while the COVID-19 vaccine makes antibodies that kill the virus when it enters our body.

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

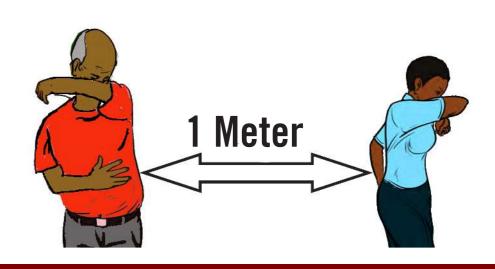
 Why should people who have been vaccinated follow preventive measures?



Is it important to follow other COVID-19 prevention methods after receiving COVID-19 vaccine?







Are there any side effects after getting the vaccine?

Facilitator's guiding points

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- Wrap-up the session by focusing on the text that unpacks what people see in the picture

Are there any side effects after getting the vaccine?

Like other vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccine may cause some mild side effects- such as, swelling, redness, and pain at injection site, fever, headache, tiredness, muscle pain and nausea.

This is not a worry and it only indicates that the vaccine has started to work and that it will go away in a few days. It is important to follow the medical advice when receiving or after receiving the vaccine so that you know what to do.

The vaccines were approved by the World Health Organization and the Malawi Government.

In Malawi, since the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine, there have been no serious side effects due to the vaccine.

What if after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine I feel sick or see signs of distress?

If you feel sick or experience any effects after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and if such signs persist

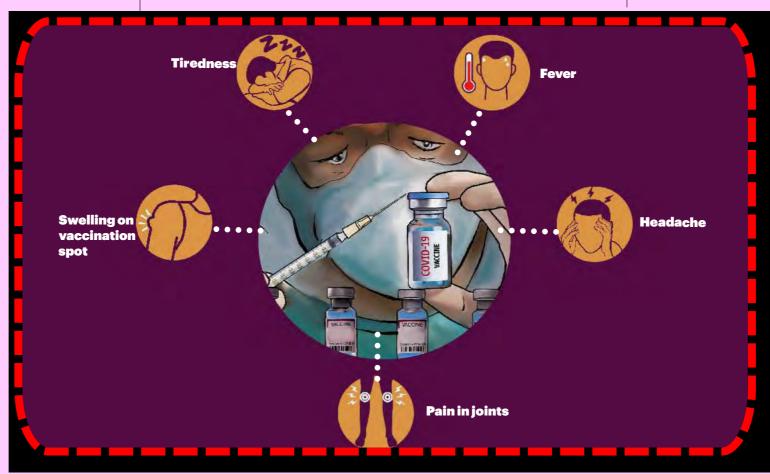
after 3 days, consult your healthcare provider or call the toll-free number 929.

Can the COVID-19 vaccine cause the disease?

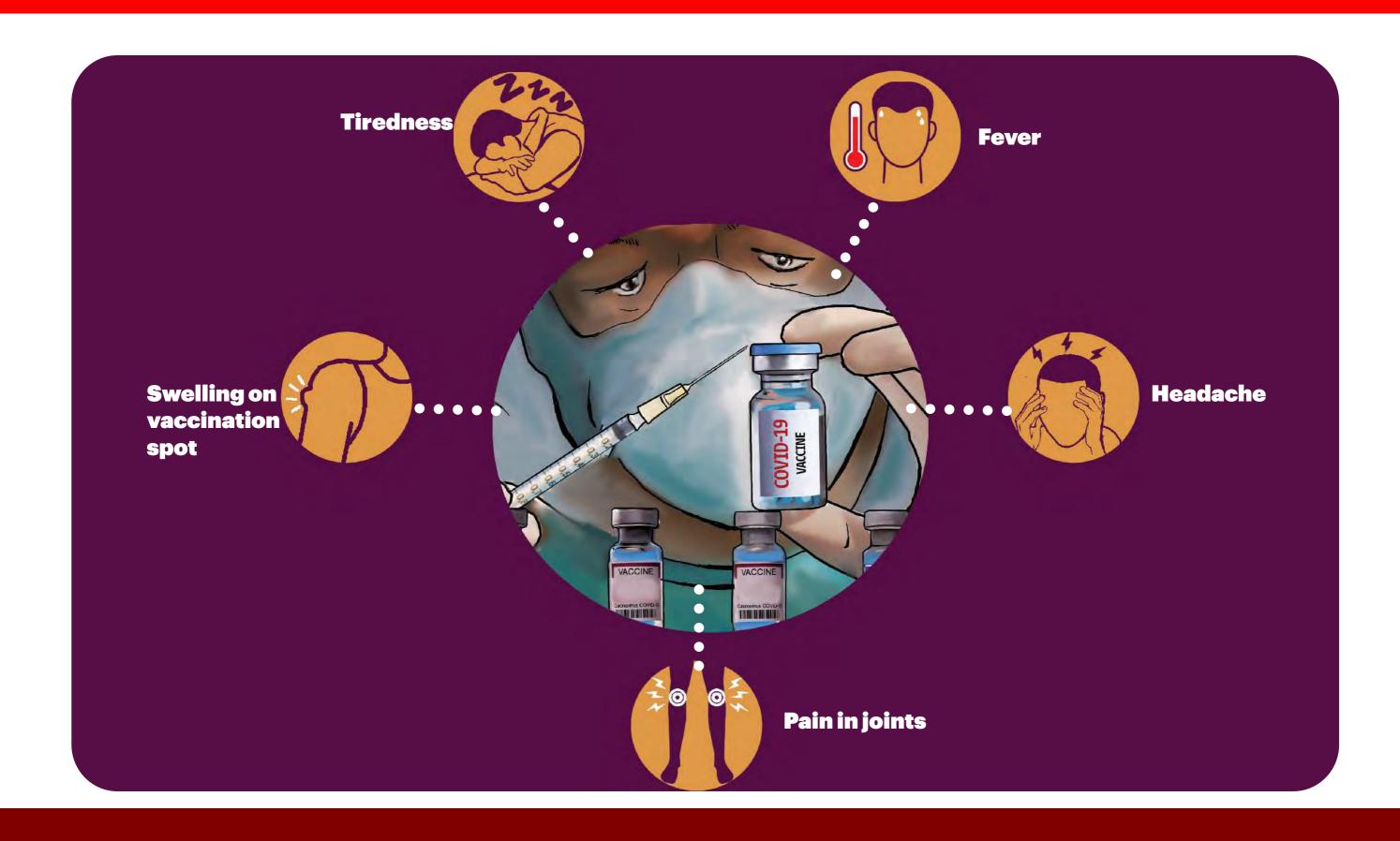
Of all approved vaccines, none of them has the COVID-19 virus. This means that the vaccine will not cause coronavirus infection.

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

 Should people be worried about COVID-19 side effects?



Does the vaccine have a problem?



Rumor Management

Facilitator's guiding points

- Expose the pictures to the community members while you look at text on the page behind it.
- Ask questions relating to what community members can see in the pictures
- Ask the individual/s about what they already know about the topic, then provide more information
- What are other people talking about covid-19 vaccine
- Why are some people reluctant to get vaccinated?
- Document all the rumors
- Wrap-up the session by focusing on the text that unpacks what people see in the picture
- Card 11 will provide facts that can be shared with community members to disprove rumors. The rumors listed on Card 11 should NOT be read to the community members unless they tell you the rumor first, which means you can then share the fact that goes with it.

Rumors come when there is lack of accurate, reliable and trustworthy information or when there is too much information, or conflicting information.

Rumors may also arise when a person is suspected of having a COVID-19 infection or someone in the community has come from a COVID-19 hotspot without following restrictions and procedures.

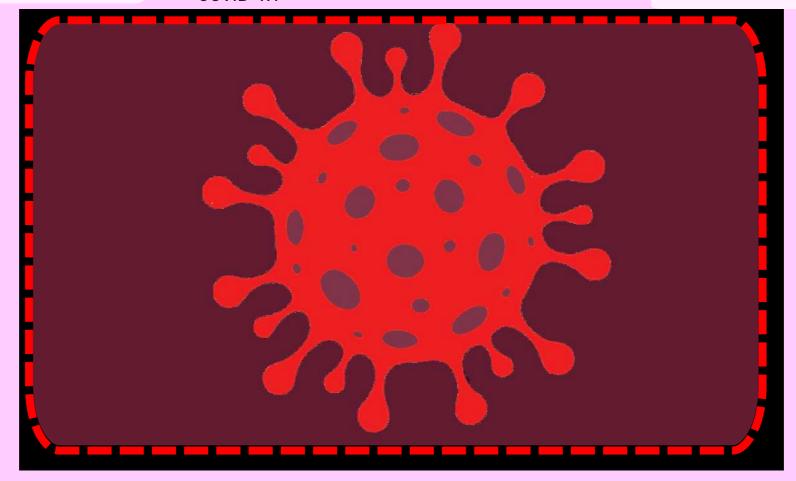
At such times it is difficult to distinguish between true and false information. To deal with local rumors, do the following:

- Contact your Health Surveillance Assistant to share the correct COVID-19 information and to ensure message consistency.
- Find rumors circulating in the area so that they can be addressed
- Listen to and follow the rumors through interviews, interactions with the public, follow media reports or messages, posted on the game pages and discuss COVID-19.

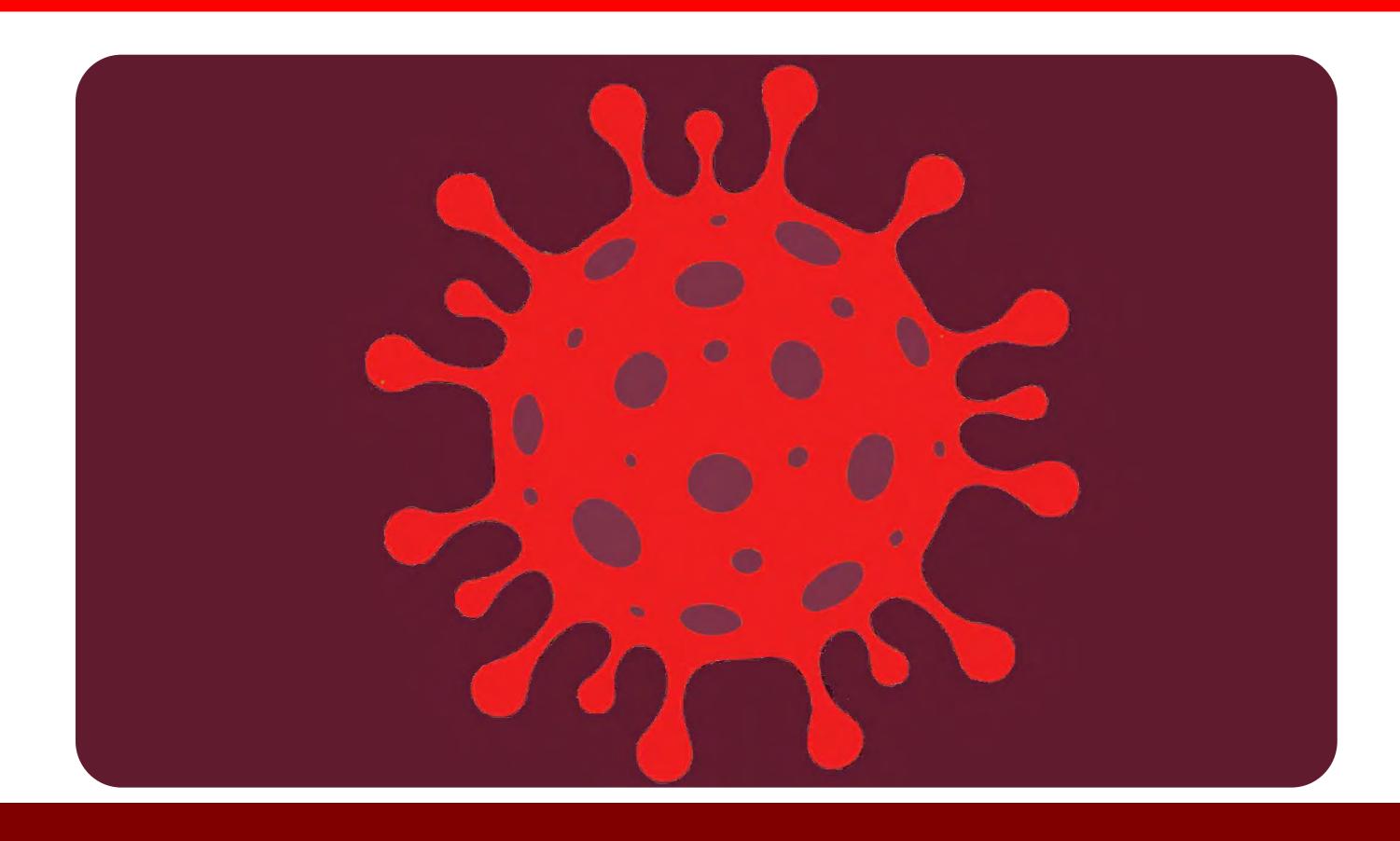
- Liaise with non-governmental organizations, media outlets, community committees such as ADC, VHC, VDC and others, leaders, church organizations, individuals and health professionals to help listen to and research the available resources.
- Inform the health counselor of all the rumors you hear. It is important to find the source of rumors and make sure they are being addressed
- Inaccurate information during a pandemic makes people more vulnerable to the disease and promotes fear and stigma.
- Make sure you get the right information from reputable sources such as the Ministry of Health.
 Always consult your health experts or go to the nearest hospital for information.

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

• How can you help stop rumors about COVID-19?



Rumor Management



What can we do if we suspect that someone in our community has COVID-19 or we have found someone with COVID-19?

Our first task is to know about the symptoms of COVID-19, and what to do if you suspect someone has COVID-19 or someone has been diagnosed with COVID-19.

First of all, it should be noted that there is currently no cure for COVID-19.

Community members should notify health volunteers if someone is showing signs of COVID-19. If someone shows signs of COVID-19, let's assume they have the disease even if they haven't been tested.

- Inform them to go to the hospital immediately to get tested for COVID-19
- Let them wear masks, covering mouth and nose every time they come in contact with people

- Let them be in isolation
- Let them wash their hands often with soap and water

When a person is found with COVID-19:

- They should stay at home, sleep in a separate room, and wear masks at all times.
- They should not walk about unless they are going to the hospital
- They should always be at least 1 meter apart if they are in contact with people.
- During isolation, they should find something to entertain them such as listening to the radio or doing other things that will make them happy

- They should have a caregiver. Caregivers should wear masks whenever they come in contact with a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and maintain one-meter distance away from him/her
- After 10 days, they should get tested again for COVID-19 to make sure they are now negative
- All people who have been in contact with the sick person should get tested for COVID-19
- If a person is very sick and has symptoms such as difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, quickly seek medical help fast

Offering Hope and Encouragement

Facilitator's guiding points

- Expose the pictures to the community members while you look at text on the page behind it.
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- Why are some people reluctant to get vaccinated?
- Document all the rumors
- Wrap-up the session by focusing on the text that unpacks what people see in the picture
- 1. Making people aware of the facts about the disease being well informed about the disease helps people to stop discrimination.
- 2. Talk to leaders about how you can help people who are being discriminated against.
- 3. Talk about people who have been infected with

Note - Important to share with communities:

Stigma and discrimination manifests itself in the form of blaming and shaming certain groups of people for the pandemic. This poses a threat to everyone. COVID-19 related stigma can lead to a range of negative consequences such as psychological stress, healthrelated violence and, worst of all, suicide for affected populations including COVID-19 survivors, suspected or quarantined cases, and people returning from overseas. In addition, COVID-19-related stigma could become a barrier to the control and prevention of COVID-19 because people who experience high levels of stigma are less likely to disclose their health status thus deterring professional help-seeking behaviors, and refusing to take COVID-19 tests. Deal with Discrimination by:

COVID-19 and are now recovering but do not name them or their caregivers or their relatives.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, people may become fearful or hopeless. Make sure you talk to people about their feelings, visit families with COVID-19 patients and take care of yourselves.

Remember, isolation and social distancing do not mean that people do not communicate or help each other everyone in the community can help while observing precautions.

Awareness of the delivery of information about COVID-19 is crucial in encouraging people to take action to eradicate the disease and to prevent the spread of fear and stigma.

Stigma;

- Encourages COVID-19 non-disclosure
- Discourages health seeking behavior among those that are sick or have symptoms



• Discourages adherence to COVID-19 restrictions

During a global epidemic, people can be terrified and loose trust in everyone. The signs to look for in people who need special counseling and mental health support are the following:

- Feeling incapable of caring for a sick relative.
- Fear of getting sick and dying from the disease.
- Desperation and self-isolation from society
- Refusal to go to the hospital.
- Fear that you will not be able to work.
- Fear of discrimination
- Fear of being separated from your loved ones.
- Reluctance to care for children, the disabled or the elderly because those who perform this function are in isolation due to COVID-19.

Explain to people about these possibilities. If you notice any of these symptoms, refer them to health experts or mental health professional.

After each discussion ask what the individual/s can do about the issue.

- Why is stigma and discrimination a problem in the fight against COVID-19?
- What roles can different stakeholders play to stop stigma and descrimination?

Card 12 Offering Hope and Encouragement



Frequently Asked Questions of COVID-19 Vaccine Safety and Efficacy

I have heard that the AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccine can cause blood clots, is this true?

Some countries had paused the roll-out of AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccine after reports of people who had been vaccinated developed blood clots. This was done as a precautionary measure so that the reports could be verified. This was a rare event, the likelihood of getting a blood clot from the vaccine is very minimal.

Will the COVID-19 vaccines protect against COVID-19 variants that are emerging in different countries?

COVID-19 variants are a changed or mutated version of the original COVID-19 virus. The variants have emerged in different countries including South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Brazil. It is very normal for a virus to change like this. Because the variants are new, scientists are still studying them to understand how common they are, how they will affect people, and how well the currently available COVID-19 vaccines will work against them.

However, all the evidence so far indicates that the currently available COVID-19 vaccines offer protection from getting a severe case of the disease even if infected by the variant.

Why are children not being given the COVID-19 vaccine?

More studies are needed to ascertain the safety of the vaccine in children. The studies so far conducted were only carried out in adults.

Normally it takes years and years to develop new vaccines, but COVID-19 vaccines have been developed in a short Period of time, does this mean they are less safe?

No. Given the prevalence of COVID-19 in the world, it was to make all plans necessary for a vaccine to be available expeditiously.

Not a single step was skipped in preparing all the COVID-19 vaccines.

In some cases, the vaccination process may be delayed for financial reasons but this has not happened. In some cases, other interventions that may be performed separately to develop a vaccine have been performed together to reduce time. It was proven that this did not reduce the reliability of the vaccine.

Can I take alcohol after receiving COVID-19 Vaccine?

Moderate use of alcohol around the time when one gets the COVID-19 vaccine shouldn't affect the immune response. It may be best to abstain for a brief period before and after vaccination. Guidance which applies for all vaccines is that one should refrain from alcohol 3 days after each injection. This will provide adequate time to assess oneself before and after the vaccines so that we reduce missing any effects following immunization.

Frequently Asked Questions of COVID-19 Vaccine Safety and Efficacy

Will I be protected from COVID-19 as soon as I have had my vaccine?

No. After the first dose of the vaccine, your body will have built some protection against the disease but not all, and the protection it has built may not last long. The second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine strengthens and completes the protection and your body s ability to fight the disease long term. It can take up to two weeks after the second dose for your body to produce antibodies which are expected to provide you with the highest protection against COVID-19. Before this time, you can still get seriously sick from COVID-19 or even die if exposed to the disease, because your body has not had enough time to build protection.

For Johnson and Johnson vaccine, after taking one dose, you are considered fully vaccinated.

How long does vaccine protection from COVID-19 last?

Because COVID-19 vaccines have only been developed recently, it is too early to know how long the protection they give will last. Research is ongoing to answer this question in the future.

I am eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, when and where do I go to receive it?

COVID-19 vaccines are currently available in government, CHAM facilities and some private facilities. Ask a health worker in your area or call toll- free number 929 to know where you can get vaccinated near you. After you have received your first dose of the COVID-19vaccine, the healthcare worker will tell you when to return for your second dose. For Johnson and Johnson you just receive 1 dose

Can I refuse the COVID-19 vaccine? Yes, COVID-19 vaccination is not mandatory. COVID-19 vaccine is offered on a voluntary basis. Even if you are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine you can still choose not to have it but it is strongly recommended that anyone eligible for the vaccine takes it.

What should I take with me when I go for the COVID-19 vaccine?

If you have a valid national ID card or other form of ID you should take it with you. However, if you don't have it with you, you can still receive the vaccine. For those with underlying conditions, please bring your health passport/profile for verification of your co-morbidity.

What will happen when I go for the COVID-19 vaccine?

- 1. When you first enter the vaccination centre someone from the vaccination team will explain to you the process and you will wait in the waiting room until it is your turn to be screened.
- 2. Next, members of the vaccination team will:
 - Ask you some questions so they can check that you are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine and register you on the system if you are not eligible you will leave after this
 - Explain how the COVID-19 vaccine protects you from COVID-19
 - Check that you understand and consent to be given the COVID-19 vaccine
 - Inject the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine into your upper arm
 - Observe you for 15-30 minutes to check that you don't have any allergic reactions
 - Tell you when to return for your second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Unless you are receiving a Johnson and Johnson vaccine in which case you will not need to return for a second dose.
 - Give you your COVID-19 vaccination card.









