Hi I’m Doctor Andy Powell the clinical director for the Totton primary care network. I’m also a GP at New Horizons Medical Partnership and have an interest in respiratory medicine. I’m recording this video today to give you some information and to hopefully answer your questions, about the Coronavirus vaccine that you will be receiving at the end of the week.

This vaccine contains a small piece of the coronavirus’s genetic code and when this enters the body it goes into the muscle cells which for a short while will produce a protein called the spike protein. This exists on the surface of the coronavirus itself and the body’s immune system recognises this as foreign and attacks and destroys it but develops a memory so that if you were to be infected with coronavirus your body will attack and destroy it more effectively. You will have a second injection in three weeks time to boost this response.

This vaccine has been incredibly well tested, about 20k patients received the vaccine in the largest trial to date and about half of these have been followed for at least two months after injection, with no serious side effects.

We know the vaccine is effective from 7 days after the second dose. When comparing the 20k patients who received the vaccine with the same number who did not, only 9 patients in the vaccine group had a coronavirus infection compared with 172 in the placebo group. This is true across all ages, sexes and ethnic groups. There was only one severe case of covid in the vaccine group, out of all 20k patients who received it. This is to be expected as no vaccine is perfect. It is also important therefore you do not change your behaviour and still maintain social distance, observe good hand hyenine and wear a mask when required.

As with all vaccines there are some side effects most of these are local round the injection site about 7 in 10 people will have pain in the injection site, about one in 20 will have redness or swelling at the injection site and this is the same after both injections. About one in three will feel tired, and one in four will have a headache after the first injection. This rises to about half after the second injection. About 1 in 8 patients will get muscle pain, and 1 in 12 will get chills or joint pain. About double will get these after the second injection. These are all normal, expected reactions after having a vaccination. Only about 1 in 70 will get a fever after the first injection but this rises to about 1 in 10 after the second. Be assured, this does not mean you have covid, it is completely impossible to get covid from this vaccine. A small number of people, 1 in 300, get swollen lymph glands.

You will have heard in the news last week that 2 patients had a significant allergic reaction after receiving the Coronavirus vaccine. Both of these had a history of severe allergy and therefore it is recommended that any patient who has had an anaphylactic reaction, this is a severe allergic reaction requiring adrenaline injections and hospitalisation, or any patient who carries an EpiPen or any other adrenaline injection pen in case of a severe allergic reaction in the future, should not receive the vaccine at this time.

Current advice is that if you are pregnant or breastfeeding you should not receive this vaccine. Women are also advised to avoid becoming pregnant during the two months after the second dose of the vaccine. This is not because of any overt safety concern, just the vaccine has not been tested in these patients. Those trials are due to start early next year. If you are actively trying for a baby or undergoing fertility treatment then you should discuss this with your own GP. There is some evidence that a coronavirus infection during pregnancy can result in premature delivery, so a decision to delay pregnancy and receive the vaccine versus continuing with attempts to fall pregnant need to be made on an individual basis, in discussion with your doctor.

Another question that is often asked is can you have the vaccine if you think or know you have had coronavirus in the past. The answer is yes, we know that there have been reports of some patients who have contracted covid twice, and it is not clear how long you are protected for after infection. There were about 3700 patients in the trial who had previous evidence of covid infection and the vaccine was just as effective in them as in those without previous infection. It is suggested that you wait at least four weeks after infection, and are fully recovered or four weeks after a positive swab if you have no symptoms. If you have long covid then please discuss vaccination with your own GP.

A final question I have been asked is around vaccine choice. Currently the only vaccine available is the Pfizer vaccine, but in the future, there will be several. Whilst any adult has the right to refuse any treatment, the converse is not necessarily true, no one has the right to insist on a particular treatment. Currently the groups eligible at a given time for a given vaccine are dictated nationally so there is no guarantee if or when you would be able to receive a difference coronavirus vaccine.

I hope this has been useful and has answered your questions.