

Why are we holding so many vaccine doses aside?

Vaccine doses are delivered to the Netherlands every week. The majority of these are made available immediately so people can be vaccinated. However, we hold some doses aside. This article explains why not all doses are used immediately to vaccinate people.

Two doses required

All of the vaccines approved to date require two doses for optimal protection against COVID-19. People must get a second dose of the vaccine within a few weeks after they have had the first for the vaccine to be maximally effective. If there is too much time between the two doses, the vaccine may not be as effective.

We therefore hold some of the doses aside so there is enough vaccine to ensure those who have had their first dose are able to get their second dose. We want to avoid a situation where people can't get a second dose on time because we have run out of the vaccine.

Preparing for shortfalls

The Netherlands has ordered enough of the vaccines for everyone to be vaccinated. We have made clear agreements with the manufacturers regarding the number of doses we will receive per quarter. For the next six weeks we know exactly how many doses we should receive.

There is always the possibility, however, that the manufactures deliver fewer doses than expected – due to a problem at the factory where the vaccines are produced, for example. If that happens, we can use the vaccine we've held aside to give a second dose to those who have already had the first dose. We are not holding aside any more vaccine than is necessary to ensure everyone can receive a second dose on time.

We are holding aside as few doses as possible

In the graph below, the blue line shows that in early January we had a lot of unadministered vaccine doses. As the month progressed, more and more people received a vaccination shot, which is shown by the growing bars in the chart. As a result, the number of unadministered doses decreased – see the falling blue line. From February we will be vaccinating even more people and the number of unadministered doses will remain small. This is because we are not holding any more doses aside than is necessary.

The graph does not show the total number of vaccines doses in stock. Instead it shows the number of days for which doses are available. For example, if the graph says '8 days' that means we have enough doses to vaccinate all the people due to receive a shot in the following 8 days, even in the unexpected event that no new doses are delivered.