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Information sheet for health professionals

The Australian Government has a strategy to deliver COVID-19 vaccines to everyone living in Australia as soon as are available.

Healthcare professionals have an important role in discussing vaccination against COVID-19 with their patients. The Department of Health has developed this information sheet to help answer your questions as well as patient questions. This will be updated and disseminated regularly with new information about the rollout, training and timings as it becomes available.

Vaccine rollout

The Australian Government announced Australia's COVID-19 Vaccine National Rollout Strategy, which details sites and priority populations for initial vaccinations, and the phases in which the vaccine doses will be made available in Australia. For details on the phased approach for the vaccine rollout visit www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines

Government agencies are currently working with states and territories on transportation, storage and distribution plans. This will ensure vaccines, syringes and needles can be moved and stored securely and distributed rapidly.

More information about training for health professionals will be available in the coming weeks. This will cover vaccine specific information, multi-dose vials, infection control and adverse event monitoring.

Vaccines for health professionals

The vaccine rollout roadmap has determined the phases of vaccination for priority groups.

Frontline health care workers identified in phase 1 of the rollout are those at the greatest risk of exposure to COVID-19. This includes people working in GP Respiratory Clinics, COVID-19 testing facilities, ambulance staff, paramedics, ICU and emergency department staff and clinical and ancillary support staff. These frontline health care workers will be vaccinated first in phase 1a.

All other health care workers will be vaccinated as soon as additional doses are available in phase 1b.



Vaccine locations

Vaccination locations will be established across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia.

About 30-50 locations will be established as ongoing Hospital Hubs in urban and rural Australia. The sites of these are being finalised in conjunction with States and Territories. They will manage cold chain storage and Pfizer vaccine only and will provide a distribution hub for hospital, quarantine and border staff and residential aged care and disability residents and staff.

In addition, more than a 1000 points of distribution nationwide will be stood up to manage and distribute the AstraZeneca vaccine. These sites will include places such as GP Respiratory clinics, GPs, state/territory vaccination clinics and Aboriginal Controlled Health Organisation clinics. Further information regarding locations of additional sites will be provided shortly.

Training for vaccine administrators

More information about training for health professionals will be available in the coming weeks that will cover vaccine specific information, multi-dose vials, infection control, wastage, and adverse event reporting.

Vaccines for patients

Once available, COVID-19 vaccines will be free for all Australian citizens, permanent residents and most visa-holders as per the Australian COVID-19 Vaccination Policy. The COVID-19 Vaccines National Rollout Strategy details the phases in which vaccines will be made available.

Initially, doses will be made available for phase 1a priority populations in 30-50 hospital hubs in urban and rural locations around Australia. These hubs will manage the Pfizer vaccine only due to specialised storage and handling requirements. Distribution to aged care and disability care facilities will be made through a Commonwealth vaccination workforce in-reach program.

From phase 1b, Pfizer vaccination hubs will continue and doses of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine will be made available at GP respiratory clinics, general practices that meet specific requirements, Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Services, and state-run vaccination clinics. From phase 2, some workplace vaccination sites will be added and the vaccination will also be available at community pharmacies that meet specific requirements.

As more information on how to access vaccines becomes available it will be provided at www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines

COVID-19 vaccines will be voluntary

Australians have a great record in being immunised. The COVID-19 vaccine will be voluntary, universal and free. When a safe and effective vaccine is available in Australia for COVID-19, the Government aims to have as many Australians as possible choose to be vaccinated for COVID-19. If people choose not to have a COVID-19 vaccine, this will not affect their family's eligibility for Family Tax Benefit Part A or childcare fee assistance which only includes National Immunisation Program vaccines for those aged younger than 20. It is possible that in future, vaccination against COVID-19 might become a requirement for travel to certain destinations or for people working in certain high-risk workplaces. If this becomes the case, there will be exemptions in place for people who are unable to be vaccinated.

Likely side effects from COVID-19 vaccines

As part of regulatory assessment the TGA considers information about possible side effects. For a vaccine to be registered for use in Australia, the benefits must outweigh the risks. As with all vaccines, some minor side effects can be expected. Usually any side effects are mild and temporary. Clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines have reported temporary side effects typical of vaccines, such as pain at the injection site, fever or muscle aches. Monitoring of vaccines will continue after a vaccine has been registered. You can report an adverse event through the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

Pregnant and breastfeeding women

Clinical trials for new medicines do not typically include pregnant or breastfeeding participants. Each country that is or has hosted clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccine candidates has different guidance regarding use of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy based on the benefits, risks and uncertainties in the context of the prevailing pandemic situation.

In preparation for vaccine rollout, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) is currently finalising clinical advice for health care providers on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in Australia in 2021. This is likely to include advice in relation to pregnant women. This advice will be provided as soon as it is received.

COVID-19 vaccines and annual influenza rollout

Routine scheduling and giving an influenza vaccine with a COVID-19 vaccine on the same day is not recommended.

This recommendation from ATAGI is based on the lack of direct data demonstrating absence of any safety issues or interference of immune responses after co-administration of an influenza and COVID-19 vaccines. As further information becomes available, this recommendation may change to permit routine co-administration.

Advice from ATAGI is that the preferred minimum interval between administration of either the Pfizer/BioNTech or the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines and any influenza vaccine is 14 days. This is precautionary advice.

International emergency authorisation for COVID-19 vaccines use overseas

Emergency use authorisation is not a full approval. In countries facing significant COVID-19 outbreaks, the benefits of rolling out a vaccine before full regulatory assessment may outweigh the risk of waiting for a full analysis. Because of the proactive management of COVID-19 in Australia, we can afford to wait for the TGA to make an assessment through the provisional registration pathway. This allows the TGA to undertake its comprehensive regulatory assessment of the safety and effectiveness of vaccine candidates.

Effectiveness of vaccines on new variants

Clinical trials, so far, are showing that the vaccines induce antibodies that are able to respond to a variety of mutations. We will continue to closely monitor developments and do our own genetic examination of local cases.

How herd immunity relates to the COVID-19 vaccination program

Herd immunity occurs when enough people are vaccinated to prevent the disease easily moving from person to person. Eventually, most of the population may be able to be protected from a particular disease if the vaccine is sufficiently protective and enough people in the population are vaccinated.

Achieving herd immunity is a long term goal. It usually requires a large proportion of the population to be vaccinated. The exact proportion that will need to be vaccinated to affect the spread of the SARSCoV-2 virus depends the characteristics of the vaccine (e.g. its ability to stop transmission, and duration of protection). As we learn more about the characteristics of COVID-19 vaccines and how well they protect against the disease and spread of the virus, many studies will be done to monitor how much impact the vaccines have and whether herd immunity is being developed over time.

What we do know is that both the Pfizer/BioNTech and the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines show they are very good at protecting against severe illness and death.

Where people can go for trusted information

For the latest up-to-date information about COVID-19 vaccines visit the Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines. Regular updates can also be accessed on the Department of Health's social media channels on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Youtube.

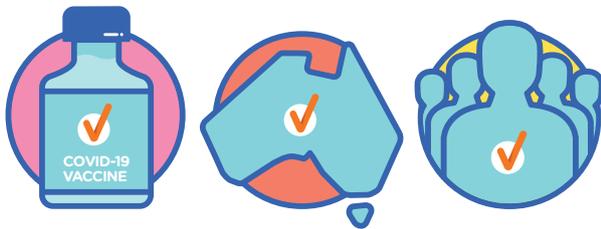
GPs can now subscribe to our COVID-19 GP newsletter about the evolving COVID-19 situation in Australia.

STAY INFORMED ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINES.

Visit health.gov.au for the latest information.

We are working to make sure everyone in Australia has access to safe, effective and free COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccines will give us the protection to go about our everyday lives.

To keep up to date with the latest progress, and to ensure your information is reliable, visit health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines



COVID-19
✓ **VACCINATION**

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