COVID-19 vaccines

Key messages

Current as of 4 May 2021

OFFICIAL

Key messages

- The COVID-19 vaccines are free, safe and voluntary – the more people who are vaccinated, the greater the protection for those vaccinated and the whole community.
- The COVID-19 vaccines are free for everyone in Australia
- The best person to talk to if you have concerns about your health and a being vaccinated against COVID-19 is your doctor/general practitioner (GP).
- Visit the Australian Government website for the latest news and updates on COVID-19 vaccines <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/learn-about-covid-19-vaccines/about-the-pfizerbiontech-covid-19-vaccine>.
- For the latest vaccine information from the Victorian Department of Health, please visitcoronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine>.
- The options to book a vaccine appointment have changed – people should now select 1 – 1 – 1 to book a COVID-19 vaccine appointment.

Why you should get vaccinated

- By getting vaccinated, you are helping protect your family, friends and community.
- Getting a COVID-19 vaccine will help protect you from getting sick from COVID-19. The vaccines are very effective at preventing serious illness due to COVID-19.
- As more people get vaccinated, the more the community is protected. This also makes it harder for COVID-19 to spread.
- By limiting the spread of COVID-19, we can also reduce the risk that new variants (strains of COVID-19) could emerge

Vaccine safety

- Before vaccines are made available in Australia, they need to pass strict safety standards set by Australia's independent medicines regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).
- Learn more about Australia's vaccine program <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/learn-about-covid-19-vaccines/about-the-pfizerbiontech-covid-19-vaccine>.

Phases of rollout

- The rollout of Australia's COVID-19 vaccine program will happen in phases to ensure that the vaccines are distributed fairly, safely, and efficiently.
- These phases are decided by the Australian Government to make sure the vaccination rollout is consistent across the country.
- The first phases of the vaccine rollout are aimed at members of our community that are at greatest risk from COVID-19, including people who are at higher risk of:
  - being exposed to COVID-19, such as health and aged care workers
  - serious illness should they contract COVID-19.
- There are several phases of the vaccine rollout – The Australian Government is currently vaccinating those in Phase 1a and Phase 1b.
- From 3 May 2021, all people aged 50 years and over in Australia will be eligible to be vaccinated with the AstraZeneca vaccine in state-supported services and GP Respiratory Clinics, and from 17 May through all general practices that provide COVID-19 vaccination.
- Find out when you will be eligible to get vaccinated using the Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccine eligibility checker <https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility>.
- You can also register to receive an SMS or email using the Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccine eligibility checker <https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility>.
- View the number of doses delivered in Victoria <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-vaccine-data>.

About the vaccines

- You will need two separate doses (injections) of the vaccine to complete the course of vaccination.
- The two doses need to be administered a few weeks apart. The space between doses is usually between 3 and 6 weeks for Pfizer, and 12 weeks for AstraZeneca.
- Two doses are required to give you the best protection against COVID-19.
- Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines do not contain milk, egg, latex, or pork products.

Getting vaccinated

- People in Phase 1a and Phase 1b <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/when-will-i-get-a-covid-19-vaccine> are currently eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccines.
- People aged 50 years and older will be able to get the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine from General Practice Respiratory Clinics and vaccination centres from 3 May 2021 and from participating general practice (GP) from 17 May 2021.
- COVID-19 vaccines will be delivered through GPs, hospital hubs, vaccination centres, community health services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and outreach programs to specific workplaces and residential care facilities.
- Learn more about how to book your vaccine appointment in the section below.
- If you can't get an appointment at your preferred location, you should continue to check back as more appointments will become available over the coming weeks.
- You don't need a Medicare card to get a vaccine. However, if you do not have a Medicare card, you should apply for an Individual Health Identifier (IHI) number <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/individual-healthcare-identifiers/how-get-ihi>.

- You do not get to choose which vaccine you receive. Both vaccines protect you against getting COVID-19 and against getting sick if you do test positive to COVID-19.
- In line with the advice of the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), the Australian Government will prioritise:
  - the Pfizer vaccine for people aged under 50 years <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/learn-about-covid-19-vaccines/about-the-pfizerbiontech-covid-19-vaccine>.
  - the AstraZeneca vaccine for people aged 50 years and over <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/learn-about-covid-19-vaccines/about-the-astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine >.
  - This will apply across all phases and priority groups set by the Australian Government <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/when-will-i-get-a-covid-19-vaccine>.
- Due to the very limited number of Pfizer doses currently available in Australia, people aged under 50 years who are part of the following groups will currently receive priority access to Pfizer vaccine in state vaccination centres:
  - Phase 1a – Hotel quarantine, border workers, frontline healthcare and testing staff, ambulance drivers and paramedics.
  - Phase 1b (Priority 1) – Household members of hotel quarantine staff, all eligible healthcare workers <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/phase-1b#healthcare-workers>.
- As more Pfizer doses become available other people in Phase 1b who are aged under 50 years will be able to receive the Pfizer vaccine.

Booking an appointment

- Eligible people have a variety of ways to book in for their vaccine appointment (see getting vaccinated section).
- People who work in settings where there is a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 may be offered COVID-19 vaccines through their employer. Many of these workers will get an email from their employer with a link to book their vaccination appointment for their first and second dose. Others will receive different advice on how to schedule their vaccination, depending on the nature and location of their work.
- You can check your eligibility for vaccination, and book an appointment with a local general practice or community health centre using the Australian Government Eligibility Checker <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccine-eligibility-checker>.
- People eligible for vaccination currently (including all people aged 50 years and over), can book an appointment at a vaccination centre by calling 1800 675 398 - select option 1 – option 1 – option 1.
- Learn more about how to book your vaccine appointment <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/book-your-vaccine-appointment>.
- If you are not currently eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, you can register to receive a notification when you can get vaccinated through the Australian Government's Eligibility Checker <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccine-eligibility-checker>.
- If you prefer not to use the Eligibility Checker <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccine-eligibility-checker>, you can call the National Coronavirus and COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline on 1800 020 080.

Side effects

- Like all medicines and vaccines, COVID-19 vaccines can have some side effects. These symptoms are generally mild and on average, last a day or two. If you have any concerns about the vaccine, contact your GP or other health care provider.
- Common reactions to any vaccination include pain where you had the injection (your arm), muscle aches, headache, fatigue or fever.
- After your first appointment, you will be asked to wait at the vaccination site for at least 15 minutes to make sure you feel okay.
- Side effects are mild for most people and are a sign that your immune system is responding to the vaccine.
- You can check your side effects using the Australian Government's Department of Health Side Effect Checker <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/covid-19-vaccine-side-effect-checker>. Serious side effects like allergic reactions or anaphylaxis are extremely rare. If this occurs, vaccination providers have medicines available to effectively and immediately treat the reaction.
- If you have previously had an allergic reaction to a vaccine, it is important that you speak to your doctor before receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

AstraZeneca and rare blood clotting condition

- A very rare, but serious clotting condition has been reported after AstraZeneca vaccine. This is called thrombosis and thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS)
- This affects approximately 4 to 6 out of a million people after receiving a first dose but has not yet been reported after the second dose of this vaccine.
- The blood clots can occur at different parts of the body, including the brain (this is called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis) and the abdomen. The low level of blood platelets can cause bleeding.
- The symptoms of this condition mostly start between 4 and 20 days after vaccination.
- People with this condition get very unwell and need to go to hospital. This condition can lead to long-term disability, and even death.
- We now have tests which can help confirm this condition and new ways of treating TTS are becoming available.
- For more information about AstraZeneca visit the Australian Government Department of Health <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/learn-about-covid-19-vaccines/about-the-astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine>.

COVIDSafe behaviours

- It will take time to distribute and vaccinate enough people to achieve high levels of protection across Australia.
- During the COVID-19 vaccine rollout you will need to maintain COVIDSafe behaviours, to keep yourself and your friends, family and loved ones safe.
    - Wash your hands with soap and water often. Use hand sanitiser when you can't wash your hands.
    - Keep 1.5 metres distance from other people.
    - Wear a face mask when required to do so.
    - Cough and sneeze into a tissue or your elbow.
    - Follow current public health restrictions.
- If you are unwell, you should get tested for COVID-19 as soon as possible and stay home until you receive a negative result.

Further information

You can find more information about the Australian Government vaccine program by visiting the Australian Government Department of Health website <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines>.

- To find out when you can receive a COVID-19 vaccine, use the Australian Government's Eligibility Checker <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccine-eligibility-checker> to find out when you can receive a COVID-19 vaccine.
    – Depending on your eligibility you can either find a vaccine provider and book an appointment or register to receive an email or SMS when you are able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.
- You can find out more about the vaccines that the Australian Government has secured by visiting the Australian Government Department of Health website <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines>.
- You can find information about the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Victoria by visiting coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine>.

To receive this document in another format, phone 1300 651 160, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email COVIDvaccination@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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