

SETTLEMENT ENGAGEMENT AND TRANSITION SUPPORT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE – INFORMATION SESSION

Wednesday 14 April 2021

On 14 April 2021, the Department of Health (the department) held an information session with approximately 40 participants of Settlement engagement and transition support community of practice. The purpose was to share information on the COVID-19 vaccine to support participants to inform their communities, and to discuss the challenges migrant and refugee communities are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine rollout.

Ms Lisa Zwankhuizen began the session with an update on the COVID-19 Vaccine Program 1b rollout, the recent advice provided by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) on use of the AstraZeneca vaccine and its implications on the vaccine rollout.

Dr Nitin Bagul provided participants with an overview of the safety, efficacy and quality of the COVID-19 vaccine, including a rundown of the vaccine approval process and ongoing review of vaccine safety.

Ms Sally McDonald from the Health Marketing Unit updated participants on the ongoing communications products being developed and distributed to combat misinformation and support the vaccine uptake, including materials developed in language.

Participants raised the following questions across the session:

1. Communication

▪ **How is the government disseminating information to CALD communities**

The department disseminates a monthly stakeholder kit for stakeholders to pass to their networks; messaging through print, radio and social channels; funding to peak multicultural orgs to support grassroots communication campaign and a small grants program to support community groups running consultations.

▪ **How can we ensure migrant and refugee communities have clear information on what the vaccines are made of?**

The department is working with Home Affairs and Services Australia's Community Liaison Officers to provide information through their networks to new migrants and refugee communities. The department is also working with the Settlement Council of Australia and Migration Council Australia to help reach migrant and refugee communities with important information on COVID-19 vaccines and has held round tables with representatives of these communities to provide information on the program and the vaccines. The department has developed a factsheet and video content to address common questions in multicultural communities about COVID-19 vaccines. This includes information on what is in the vaccines. The factsheet is published on the health website in [63 languages](#) and was disseminated to over 3000 stakeholders and community members to disseminate within their networks. In-language social tiles have also been developed to address vaccine ingredients.

▪ **How can we ensure people who cannot read and write in English or their own language, are adequately informed?**

The department seeks advice from the recently established Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities COVID-19 Health Advisory Group on messaging and channels used to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse audiences. The COVID-19 Communications Working Group is a subset which supports the development and distribution of COVID-19 information by providing insights and recommendations on communication with

multicultural audiences. We also have a multicultural public relations specialist to extend the reach of communications through local level engagement with harder to reach audiences. Public relations activities include distribution of monthly stakeholder outreach packs with translated communication resources, distributed to over 3000 multicultural stakeholders and community leaders. Resources in the stakeholder outreach pack is intended for use by multicultural stakeholders and community leaders to disseminate amongst their networks and contacts and include videos, social media content, audio files, website site and newsletter content, etc.

▪ **How can we encourage clients to get vaccinated while allowing choice?**

The department aims to provide timely in-language information from trusted sources to people from multicultural backgrounds, in order to ensure people can make well informed choices about vaccination. This includes developing a series of in-language videos to address some of the misinformation and concerns expressed by multicultural communities. This video series feature bi-lingual health professionals covering topics including how vaccines work, safety and approval processes and messaging reinforcing that COVID-19 vaccines are available for everyone in Australia. The videos are available on the Department of Health website in 20 languages, including English. The department is also currently developing in-language videos sharing vaccination stories. These will involve individuals being filmed while having their vaccination. The videos will have an in-language voiceover with the participant talking about why they are having their vaccination as well as share their views of why having the vaccines is important. We have a dedicated section of the Department of Health website which provides information to address the misconceptions circulating about the COVID-19 vaccines. An in-language [FAQ document](#) reflecting the content on this section of the website, in 63 languages is available.

▪ **How can we help debunk the myths, such as “the vaccines change a person’s DNA”?**

The Department’s [COVID-19 vaccines – Is it true?](#) section can help debunk myths. Social media content, videos and frequently asked questions documents have all been translated and provided to stakeholders to help distribute this message to provide assurance that the COVID-19 vaccine [does not alter your DNA](#).

▪ **When will an updated stakeholder communications kit be available?**

Week commencing 24 May.

▪ **Issue on whether information is from a trusted source and the best way to actually communicate to communities**

Funding of grassroots grants allows greater reach with better targeting to get trusted information out to communities. The department will continue to work with stakeholders to achieve this.

2. About the vaccine

- **Is the AstraZeneca vaccine still safe for people over 50**

In line with the [Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation \(ATAGI\) advice](#) the key concern is the cohort of people under 50, current research shows the clotting risk drops significantly for people aged 50 and older.

ATAGI consider that the individual benefit-to-risk balance of vaccination with COVID-19 vaccine AstraZeneca in Australia varies with age. The risk of ongoing health issues and death from COVID-19 is highest in older age groups, particularly rising from 50 years of age.

In the context of the ongoing risk of COVID-19 in Australia, ATAGI considers that the benefit-to-risk balance is favourable for use of AstraZeneca vaccine in all older adult age groups.

- **How long will immunity last post vaccination, is the virus still transmittable**

These vaccines have been shown to prevent severe COVID-19 illness. But it's not yet known whether the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccines prevent transmission of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19 — or asymptomatic disease.

People who have received must maintain currently established prevention methods.

- **Is there evidence around any ethnic groups being more susceptible to adverse events from the vaccine**

No. There is no clear signal or evidence that exists within current research and testing on the vaccines.

- **Why can't we all just get the Pfizer vaccine?**

The AstraZeneca vaccine is highly effective at reducing the risk of death or severe disease from COVID-19 across all adult age groups. At the present time, the AstraZeneca vaccine is the only vaccine option for reducing this risk for many Australians, since the global availability of alternative vaccines is highly constrained.

On 8 April 2021, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommended that the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is preferred over the AstraZeneca vaccine for adults aged under 50 years

The Australian Government has secured 40 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine. However, most of these will be delivered in the second half of 2021.

- **When will the Australian Government receive the additional 20 million doses of Pfizer?**

The Australian Government has secured an additional 20 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.

Through the Government's Advance Purchase Agreement with Pfizer, these additional 20 million Pfizer doses means Australia will now receive a total of 40 million Pfizer doses in 2021.

It is anticipated that these additional 20 million doses will be available in the second half of 2021.

- **If people refuse the vaccine, will the virus continue to spread? If so, how can we mitigate this?**

Achieving herd immunity is a long-term goal. It usually requires a large amount of the population to be vaccinated. Studies will monitor the impact of COVID-19 vaccines in Australia and whether herd immunity is developing over time.

For this reason, public health practices will stay in place until evidence shows that:

- vaccination prevents transmission and
- herd immunity is achieved in Australia.

In the meantime, everyone still needs to:

- [practise good hygiene](#)
- [maintain physical distance](#)
- stay home if you are sick and [get tested](#)
- download the [COVIDSafe app](#)

▪ **If someone has already had COVID-19, should they still be vaccinated?**

Yes, people who have had COVID-19 and recovered should still be vaccinated.

▪ **Does the COVID-19 vaccine give you COVID?**

None of the approved vaccines in Australia contain the live virus. This means they cannot give you COVID-19.

▪ **Are you immune from COVID-19 straight after receiving both doses of the vaccine?**

Individuals may not be fully protected until 7-14 days after their second dose of the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine.

▪ **Is there any new evidence around the vaccine providing immunity to COVID-19, such as how long immunity lasts and whether we will need a booster shot each year or couple of years?**

It is not yet known how long the COVID-19 vaccine protection will last. Clinical trials are currently happening to find out if we will need booster doses on an annual or longer basis. To be fully vaccinated in the initial vaccine roll out, a person must have two doses of the same vaccine, given at the appropriate dosing schedule.

▪ **Will the vaccines work if the virus mutates?**

All viruses mutate. COVID-19 is no different and there have been reports in media recently about new strains of the virus.

Data on the real-world effectiveness and duration of protection from the AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines, including against current and emerging strains (variants), will be gathered over coming months and years and will be assessed to form future Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommendations.

▪ **Can an individual receive a COVID and flu vaccine at same time**

It is recommended that people wait at least 14 days between a dose of seasonal flu vaccine and a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. The 14-day time frame is a precautionary measure to manage the common side effects that come with many vaccinations.

▪ **Can kids be vaccinated?**

Pfizer has been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for use in Australia for children aged 16 and 17 years.

At this stage, neither the Pfizer nor AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines have approval for use in children under 16 years.

3. Vaccine Rollout Strategy

- **Where can we find regular updates on the rollout strategy and its progress?**

The Department of Health's website contains data about Australia's COVID-19 vaccine rollout. This page is updated every day with the latest information. ([Australia's COVID-19 vaccine rollout | Australian Government Department of Health](#)).

- **As there have been delays to the vaccination schedule, are we still optimistic for completion of vaccinations by the end of the year?**

National Cabinet agreed to recalibrate the delivery model for the COVID-19 Vaccination Rollout Strategy, taking into account the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) medical advice on the use of the AstraZeneca vaccines, and COVID-19 vaccine supply arrangements.

The Australian Government is working through the implications of the new delivery model with the states and territories as a priority.

- **What happens if someone is eligible for vaccine now (e.g. Phase 1B) but is unable to see their usual GP? How can they demonstrate to another GP who does not have their health record on file, that they are eligible?**

Individuals with a [specified underlying medical conditions](#) can demonstrate eligibility through

- their clinic's records, where they are attending their usual GP
- MyHealth Record
- a referral from their GP or treating specialist
- alternative medical records including:
 - a printout of an individual's medical history as recorded in clinical records
 - a printout of an individual's chronic disease care plan or a discharge summary from a hospital
 - a valid script or medication prescribed to treat one or more of the relevant medical conditions.

Where none of these are available individuals may complete an [eligibility declaration form](#).

- **Why is there no local master list for who will get the vaccine**

Providing all people in Australia with access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines is a key priority for the Australian Government.

4. Other

- **What is ATAGI?**

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advises the Minister for Health on the National Immunisation Program (NIP) and other immunisation issues.

- **How can community groups apply for the small community grants? Where can we find more information?**

The organisation administering will lead promotion and establish the criteria, however these have not yet started with an aim to open in the coming weeks.