

## SETSCoP Questions on COVID-19 Vaccine Roll Out

### Eligibility

**Q. Will people on temporary visas who are not eligible for Medicare, be vaccinated? If so, what is the process for them to receive the vaccine?**

**A.** COVID-19 vaccines are voluntary and free for everyone in Australia. If you do not have a Medicare card, you can get your vaccination at a Coronavirus (COVID-19) GP respiratory clinic (please check: <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/coronavirus-covid-19-gp-respiratory-clinics>) or at your local state or territory vaccination clinic.

**Q. Will individuals not eligible for Medicare have to pay for the vaccine?**

**A.** No. Everyone in Australia can access the COVID-19 vaccine for free regardless of their Medicare eligibility.

**Q. If I refuse to get vaccinated at one point, will I still be able to get vaccinated later?**

**A.** Yes. Your eligibility will never expire. Please check: [www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/when-will-i-get-a-covid-19-vaccine](http://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/when-will-i-get-a-covid-19-vaccine) to find out when you are eligible for your vaccine.

**Q. What if my loved one attends respite in an aged care facility. Will they be eligible for phase 1 of the vaccine rollout?**

**A.** If your loved one is at a residential facility on the day the vaccine is delivered they can receive the vaccination at the same time as other residents.

Otherwise, a person 70 years and over and/or with a disability or aged-related condition (e.g. early onset dementia) who attends respite care, is eligible under phase 1b and can receive their vaccination from registered GPs or GP-led Respiratory Clinics.

If you would like to book an appointment, visit the Eligibility Checker on the Department of Health's website, [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au). Those eligible are able to view vaccination clinic locations and details to book an appointment.

**Q. Will a carer of someone who is in the priority category receive the vaccine at phase 1?**

**A.** Yes, eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine under phase 1b includes

- Carers (paid and unpaid) of:
  - a resident of an aged care facility or residential disability accommodation who is eligible under phase 1a
  - a person 70 years and over who is eligible under phase 1b
  - a person with a specified underlying medical condition who is eligible under phase 1b
- Disability and aged care support volunteers who provide support to people in their homes, respite care, educational, employment, leisure and/or residential settings, including those providing transport and advocacy services.

- People with a disability or with age-related conditions (e.g. early onset dementia) attending centre-based services (e.g. day programs, respite care, support employment).
- Requirements include: carers documentation or proof of occupation (ID card or letter from employer/centre-based support provider). Where none of these are available, including family members or others who provide significant care, individuals may complete an Eligibility Declaration Form.

Should you require any further information on priority groups for phase 1b the following document link may be useful:

[https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-program-phase-1b\\_1.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-program-phase-1b_1.pdf)

**Q. Will children be eligible for the vaccine?**

- A.** At this stage, neither the Pfizer nor AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines have approval for use in children from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), Australia’s medical regulator. The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine has been provisionally approved by the TGA for patients 16 years and older, while AstraZeneca is provisionally approved for use in patients 18 years and older.

This is mostly because there are limited clinical trial results demonstrating that the vaccines are effective and safe in these age groups. International clinical trials with children are planned or are underway, and to date there is no evidence to indicate that in the future children should not be able to receive both of these vaccines.

Children will be eligible for the vaccine under phase 3 of the rollout, if research determines the vaccines are safe and effective and following approval from the TGA.

**Q. Will you be notified when you are eligible to receive the vaccine (e.g. when the rollout has reached your phase)?**

- A.** We recommend people use the Eligibility Checker to check in what phase of the rollout they will be eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. The Eligibility Checker is on the Department of Health’s website, [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au). People who are not currently eligible can register for a notification of when their eligibility phase commences.

Information on the phased eligibility rollout is also available via the National Coronavirus Helpline (1800 020 080).

**About the Vaccine**

**Q. What are the ingredients of the vaccine?**

- A.** Please see the list provided on the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) website:

- List of ingredients for the Pfizer (Comirnaty) at: <https://www.ebs.tga.gov.au/ebs/picmi/picmirepository.nsf/pdf?OpenAgent&id=CP-2021-PI-01092-1&d=202102161016933&d=202103241016933>
- List of ingredients for AstraZeneca (ChAdOx1-S /University of Oxford) at: <https://www.tga.gov.au/sites/default/files/auspar-chadox1-s-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca-210215-pi.pdf>

**Q. What are the potential immediate side effects of the vaccine?**

- A.** All vaccines can have some side effects. These side effects are usually mild and only last for a few days. Clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines have shown some side effects that didn't last long, such as a sore arm after injection, fever or muscle aches and headaches. These are a sign the vaccine is working and doing its job.

If you have any questions or worries after your vaccinations, just contact your vaccination clinic or doctor.

**Q. What are the potential long-term side effects of the vaccine?**

- A.** It is not yet known what long-term side effects, if any, are linked to COVID-19 vaccines. Australia's medical experts advise that the benefits of vaccination against COVID-19 continue to outweigh any risk of side effects.

**Q. Will the vaccine negatively react with any medications I am taking?**

- A.** The safety and efficacy of having the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca with other medications has not been fully evaluated as yet. Similarly with the Pfizer vaccine, limited interaction studies have been performed.

Advice from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is to tell your doctor of medications you are taking, have recently taken or might take any other medications, including medicines, vitamins or supplements that you buy without prescription from your pharmacy, supermarket or health food shop.

**Q. How long does the vaccine protect a person from infection?**

- A.** It is not yet known how long the protection of the COVID-19 vaccine will last. This is being evaluated in ongoing research.

The aim of Australia's COVID-19 vaccination program is to reduce COVID-19 related harm by preventing serious illness and death, and, as much as possible, disease transmission.

There's a lot more research about the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines — meaning how well a vaccine prevents someone from getting the virus — than about the lifespan of the vaccines.

Until we have a better understanding of how long immunity will last, whether the vaccine prevents transmission and whether we can achieve herd immunity, it will be important to maintain the public health protections that keep us COVIDSafe. As the research and real-world data continues we will get a clearer picture.

**Q. Is the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine more effective? What are their levels of effectiveness?**

- A.** The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has approved two COVID-19 vaccines for use in Australia: Pfizer and AstraZeneca which means Australians have access to two very good vaccines, both of which are safe, effective and high quality.

All vaccines are thoroughly tested for quality, safety and efficacy before they are approved for use in Australia. This includes careful analysis of clinical trial data, ingredients, chemistry, manufacturing and other factors.

The top priority of the Australian vaccination program is to prevent severe illness, hospitalisations and deaths and both vaccines approved by the TGA have been found to be highly effective at achieving these outcomes.

**Q. Once you get the vaccine, will you be completely immune from COVID-19?**

- A.** The duration of immunity of the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines is unknown as they are still being determined by ongoing clinical trials and analysis of real-world effectiveness data. Until we have a better understanding of how long immunity will last, it will be important to maintain the public health protections that keep us COVIDSafe.

**Q. If you are vaccinated, can you still spread the virus?**

- A.** After receiving your vaccination, it is still important for to continue safe practices to stop COVID-19 from spreading. Stay 1.5 metres away from others, wash your hands regularly with soap and water, stay home when you're feeling unwell, and wear a mask when required.

Until we have a better understanding of how long immunity will last, whether the vaccine prevents transmission it will be important to maintain the public health protections that keep us COVIDSafe.

**Q. How many doses are needed? Will I need a yearly vaccine similar to the flu vaccine?**

- A.** Based on the best available evidence and advice at this time, it is not possible to tell whether COVID-19 vaccines will be required annually in the future, similar to the influenza vaccine. However trial participants will continue to be monitored to learn more over time, to help determine whether booster doses will be needed.

The number and timing of doses will vary between different COVID-19 vaccines and you should follow the guidance of your immunisation provider.

If having the Pfizer vaccine, two doses are required around 3 weeks apart. The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine also requires two doses, given around 12 weeks apart (or as short as 4 weeks apart, if necessary).

Refer to COVID-19 Vaccination – ATAGI clinical guidance on COVID-19 vaccine in Australia in 2020/21 at: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-atagi-clinical-guidance-on-covid-19-vaccine-in-australia-in-2021> for more details on dose timing.

**Q. Will there be any side effects for women who wish to get pregnant?**

- A.** If you are pregnant, you should speak to your doctor about COVID-19 vaccines. If you don't have medical risks, or high exposure to COVID-19, you and your doctor may decide to wait until after the baby is born to have the COVID-19 vaccines.

If you are breastfeeding, you can receive COVID-19 vaccines. There are no expected safety concerns for breastfeeding women, or their babies.

If you are planning a pregnancy, you can receive COVID-19 vaccines.

If you have any questions about COVID-19 vaccines and pregnancy or breastfeeding, speak to your doctor.

**Administration**

**Q. How does the government check whether or not health care professionals have completed the necessary training to administer the vaccine?**

- A.** The Australian Government has partnered with the Australian College of Nursing to provide training for the COVID-19 vaccination workforce. This includes immunisation providers and non-clinical and administration staff.

The training is mandatory for COVID-19 vaccination providers.

The modules in the training cover administering vaccines from multi-dose vials, handling and storage of vaccines, safety and surveillance monitoring, and reporting for adverse events after immunisation.

**Q. How many vaccine hubs will be available in Sydney?**

- A.** From 22 March 2021, under phase 1b onwards, the AstraZeneca vaccine will be available at General Practitioner-led respiratory clinics, General Practices that meet specific requirements, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, and state-run vaccination clinics. All participating general practices will be listed in the Healthdirect services finder, <https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility>

As the roll out continues, more locations will be available. When vaccines become broadly available, some community pharmacies that meet specific requirements will be added.

**Q. Will GPs be able to administer the vaccine?**

- A.** General practices are critical partners in Australia's COVID-19 Vaccine National Roll-out Strategy. They will provide comprehensive COVID-19 immunisation coverage for their local populations.

More than 1,000 general practices have joined the program from 22 March 2021. This number will increase during the rollout.

As the rollout progresses all interested general practices will have the opportunity to participate. This will allow for equity of access to COVID-19 vaccines and recognise the important role of general practitioners in their local communities.

To find a general practice near you please visit the vaccine eligibility checker and follow the steps at: <https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility>

### **Information**

#### **Q. Is there somewhere I can find in-language information about the vaccine and vaccine rollout?**

A. In- language web pages are available on Department of Health's website and this is translated into 63 languages. This can be found at <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-information-in-your-language> Translated resources will be added to each in-language page as they become available.

#### **Q. Is there any academic research on the safety of the vaccine?**

A. The TGA are the scientists and medical experts who regulate and approve all vaccines, medicines, and other medical goods for use in Australia. The TGA checks all COVID-19 vaccines for quality, safety and effectiveness before approving them for use in Australia. This is the same process that all vaccines go through in Australia.

Medical experts in the TGA continuously check all vaccines to ensure they are safe.

For more details please visit <https://www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccine-approval-process>

#### **Q. How can we ensure that those most vulnerable in our refugee and migrant communities are informed of and have access to the vaccine?**

A. The Department of Health is undertaking extensive consultation with representatives of culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse stakeholders, including peak organisations, community representatives, religious leaders, youth, health professionals, and settlement services.

The Department has already held an information session with Migration Council of Australia's community of practice (CoP) service providers who support refugees and vulnerable migrants under the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) program.

The department will continue to hold further information sessions and consultation forums with stakeholders and community organisations such as Settlement Council of Australia to that the information about the Government's free COVID-19 Vaccination Program reaches everyone.

The Australian Government has also invested in a \$31 million COVID-19 vaccination public information campaign which is now rolling out across the country, with \$1.3 million provided for peak multicultural organisations to help reach multicultural communities. This will assist multicultural organisations to support their members with local (states and territories) level efforts.

**Q. Clients sometimes tells us about the information they receive from family/friends overseas about the lack of safety in the vaccines. What can we say to them to address concerns?**

**A.** Information provided in Australia is targeted to people living in Australia. The Australian Government cannot provide advice on the safety, quality and efficacy of vaccines that have been approved for use outside of Australia's regulatory process.

**Q. Will it be required to have a vaccine to travel outside Australia and then be let back in?**

**A.** Further consideration will be given to this issue as time passes and the level of vaccination take-up in Australia and globally increases, and the progress of the COVID-19 virus.

At this time, Australian Government advice for international travellers remains unchanged, regardless of your COVID-19 vaccination status.

**Q. Should I as service provider only allow vaccinated staff to work with clients who are high risk, e.g. older people?**

**A.** Vaccinations in Australia are voluntary, including the COVID-19 vaccine, however the Australian Government highly recommends that everyone in Australia be vaccinated.

Workplace occupational health and safety is a matter for individual employers and providers. On 23 Jan the Australian Health Protection Principle Committee (AHPPC) stated: *While AHPPC strongly encourages COVID-19 vaccination, at this time AHPPC does not recommend mandating COVID-19 vaccination for the aged care workforce at this stage.*

Safe Work Australia has released some advice about work health and safety laws and COVID-19 vaccination. You can find this information at: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/general-industry-information/vaccination>.