

COVID-19 vaccines

Newsletter – 9 February 2021

Information for COVID-19 vaccine providers

OFFICIAL

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Latest updates

- The first stage of the Commonwealth Government COVID-19 vaccination program will be ready to be rolled out in Victoria for priority group 1a – including people who are at higher risk of contracting coronavirus (COVID-19) or of severe illness – at nine suburban and regional health services across the state (vaccine hubs) as soon as a vaccine is available. Read more about [who will get the vaccine first](https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/who-will-get-the-vaccines) <<https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/who-will-get-the-vaccines>>.
- The Commonwealth Government is responsible for the delivery of vaccines to states and territories.
- The Victorian Government is working closely with the Commonwealth to ensure we implement the vaccination program rapidly, safely and equitably using evidence-based research.
- On 25 January 2021, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) announced provisional approval of the Pfizer/BioNTech (Pfizer) COVID-19 vaccine for use in Australia.
- The TGA's decision was informed by the Advisory Committee on Vaccines – an independent group of clinical and scientific experts with consumer representation.
- The Pfizer vaccine is the first COVID-19 vaccine to receive Commonwealth regulatory approval in Australia, undergoing the required assessment and approval process and meeting high safety, efficacy and quality standards.
- The Commonwealth advises the first doses of the Pfizer vaccine are expected to be rolled out in late February. Final dates will be confirmed shortly and are subject to shipping and distribution.

- The rollout of other vaccines, including the Oxford/AstraZeneca (AstraZeneca) vaccine, will depend on the Commonwealth's regulatory approval, volume and timing of doses becoming available.
- During the vaccine roll out it is critical that we all continue to be [COVIDSafe](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covidsafe-summer) <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covidsafe-summer>.
- The COVID-19 vaccines will be free to all people who choose to be vaccinated.
- The Commonwealth has released an [expression of interest for pharmacies](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/community-pharmacy-covid-19-vaccine-rollout-from-phase-2a) <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/community-pharmacy-covid-19-vaccine-rollout-from-phase-2a> to support Phase 2a of the vaccine rollout.
- The Commonwealth has added the [COVID-19 vaccine aged care stakeholder kit](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-vaccine-aged-care-stakeholder-kit) <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-vaccine-aged-care-stakeholder-kit> for aged care residents, workers and their families.
- Read more about [Australia's COVID-19 vaccine national rollout strategy](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/australias-covid-19-vaccine-national-roll-out-strategy) <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/australias-covid-19-vaccine-national-roll-out-strategy>.

Delivery of COVID-19 vaccines

Priority groups

Australia's COVID-19 vaccines will be available in phases, as defined by the Commonwealth's schedule, with the Commonwealth prioritising groups based on [expert medical and public health advice](https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/who-will-get-the-vaccines) <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/who-will-get-the-vaccines>.

People eligible to receive priority access to a COVID-19 vaccine as part of Phase 1a include:

- quarantine and border workers and all staff working in the hotel quarantine program
- frontline at-risk healthcare workers, including hospital staff working in coronavirus (COVID-19) and suspected coronavirus (COVID-19) wards, emergency department and intensive care unit staff, staff at general practice respiratory clinics and coronavirus (COVID-19) testing facilities, and ambulance staff and paramedics
- aged care and disability care staff and residents.

Vaccine hubs

The Pfizer vaccine must be stored at -70°C, resulting in the need for special storage and distribution arrangements. This is why Victorians at greatest risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) will initially be able to receive COVID-19 vaccine at the following Victorian public hospital vaccination hubs:

- Albury Wodonga Health.
- Austin Health
- Ballarat Health
- Barwon Health
- Bendigo Health
- Goulburn Valley Health
- Latrobe Regional Hospital
- Monash Health
- Western Health

In addition to these initial hospital hubs for the Pfizer vaccine, work is underway to identify sites across Victoria to ensure all Victorians can easily access other COVID-19 vaccines when they become available. Read the latest [media release](https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-services-ready-vaccine-rollout) <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-services-ready-vaccine-rollout>.

AstraZeneca vaccine

The Commonwealth anticipates that the AstraZeneca vaccine may be available from late March 2021, although this is dependent on TGA approval and distribution of the vaccine to states and territories.

Unlike the Pfizer vaccine, the AstraZeneca vaccine is refrigerated at conventional cold-chain temperatures and will be available to the Victorian community.

The Victorian Department of Health (the Department) is dedicated to continuing engagement with our partners and stakeholders to rollout COVID-19 vaccines. The Commonwealth is leading the expression of interest engagement process to participate in the rollout at various phases.

Surge workforce consultation

The Department recognises that significant expansion of the current immuniser workforce in Victoria will be required to deliver the Commonwealth's COVID-19 vaccination program, together with additional resources to assist with the establishment and operations of COVID-19 vaccination sites.

The department has undertaken a consultation with key stakeholders regarding the need to undertake emergency authorisation of a time-limited surge workforce to support the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination program in Victoria.

Any additional authorised surge workforce will require additional training to assist with the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines. This newly authorised workforce will help support existing services to undertake the challenge of providing COVID-19 vaccination to every eligible Victorian who wishes to be vaccinated in 2021.

Training for COVID-19 vaccine providers

All COVID-19 vaccine providers, including existing authorised immunisers, will need to undertake training specific to COVID-19 vaccines.

The Commonwealth training package for COVID-19 vaccine providers has been released – access the [National COVID-19 Vaccination Training Program](https://covid19vaccinationtraining.org.au/login/index.php) <<https://covid19vaccinationtraining.org.au/login/index.php>>.

In addition to the National COVID-19 Training Program any Victorian provider who will be administering vaccine under emergency authorisation (currently under consultation as above) will also need to complete the Victorian COVID-19 Vaccination Procedures Training Package which will include:

- online eLearning
- local or Victorian practical new immuniser simulation.

More information will be available online in coming days on training requirements and enrolment.

Read the media release on:

- [Mobilising Australia's COVID-19 vaccine workforce](https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/mobilising-australias-covid-19-vaccine-workforce) <<https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/mobilising-australias-covid-19-vaccine-workforce>>
- [Victoria's vaccine rollout](https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-services-ready-vaccine-rollout) <<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victorian-health-services-ready-vaccine-rollout>>.

Safety of the vaccine

- As part of Australia's stringent regulatory assessment process for new medicines and vaccines, the TGA considers information about possible side effects. For a vaccine to be registered for use in Australia, the benefits must outweigh the risks.
- The TGA continues to monitor vaccines after registration and distribution so that the Australian health system can detect and respond to any safety concerns. Australia has a strong and well-established safety

monitoring system for vaccines. Reports of suspected side effects from health professionals and consumers are an essential element of this safety monitoring.

- The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) is finalising clinical advice for health care providers on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in Australia. This is expected to include information regarding COVID-19 vaccination for pregnant and breastfeeding women.
- More information about how we're monitoring COVID-19 vaccine safety, what to do if you think a patient is experiencing a side effect, and how to report adverse events is available on the [TGA website](https://www.tga.gov.au) <<https://www.tga.gov.au>>.
- Adverse event reporting will occur through existing Victorian reporting processes. For more information, visit [immunisation reporting](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation/adverse-events-following-immunisation-reporting) <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation/adverse-events-following-immunisation-reporting>>.
- A hotline will also be available for clinicians reporting adverse events, and further specialist capacity is being created for rapid referral and follow up of patients who may have had a significant adverse event.
- Read the TGA statement on the findings of its [Norwegian investigation into COVID-19 vaccine risks for elderly people](https://www.tga.gov.au/media-release/investigation-reveals-no-specific-risk-covid-19-vaccinations-elderly-patients) <<https://www.tga.gov.au/media-release/investigation-reveals-no-specific-risk-covid-19-vaccinations-elderly-patients>>.
- More information specific to COVID-19 vaccines regarding adverse events following immunisation (AEFI) procedures, and any contraindications to vaccination, will follow as more information becomes available.

Influenza and COVID-19 vaccines

Routine co-administration of an influenza vaccine with a COVID-19 vaccine on the same day is not recommended. This recommendation from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) is based on the lack of direct safety and efficacy data regarding co-administration.

[ATAGI's interim advice](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/atagi-advice-on-influenza-and-covid-19-vaccines) <<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/atagi-advice-on-influenza-and-covid-19-vaccines>> is to space COVID-19 and influenza vaccination by at least 14 days. This is a precautionary approach, and as further information becomes available, this recommendation may change to permit closer spacing or co-administration.

The department is expecting confirmation of volumes and dates for delivery of influenza vaccines to be provided by the Commonwealth in the coming weeks.

More information and resources

Australia

- Commonwealth Department of Health COVID-19 information: health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines
- Commonwealth COVID-19 vaccines campaign and communications materials (including videos, social media content and posters): health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/coronavirus-covid-19-vaccines-campaign-materials
- TGA media release on the approval of the Pfizer vaccine: [tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccine-pfizer-australia-comirnaty-bnt162b2-mrna](https://www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccine-pfizer-australia-comirnaty-bnt162b2-mrna)
- TGA media release on the start of a Norwegian investigation into COVID-19 vaccine risks for elderly people: <https://www.tga.gov.au/media-release/norwegian-investigation-covid-19-vaccination-risks-elderly-very-frail-patients>
- TGA media release on the conclusion of the Norwegian investigation into COVID-19 vaccine risks for elderly people: [tga.gov.au/media-release/investigation-reveals-no-specific-risk-covid-19-vaccinations-elderly-patients](https://www.tga.gov.au/media-release/investigation-reveals-no-specific-risk-covid-19-vaccinations-elderly-patients)

- Commonwealth Department of Health media release on the approval of the Pfizer vaccine: [health.gov.au/news/tga-provisionally-approves-pfizerbiontech-covid-19-vaccine-for-use-in-australia](https://www.health.gov.au/news/tga-provisionally-approves-pfizerbiontech-covid-19-vaccine-for-use-in-australia)
- Commonwealth Department of Health media release on the COVID-19 vaccine aged care stakeholder kit: [health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-vaccine-aged-care-stakeholder-kit](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-vaccine-aged-care-stakeholder-kit)

Victoria

- Victorian Department of Health COVID-19 vaccine information: coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine
- Victorian Department of Health COVID-19 vaccine research hub: coronavirus.vic.gov.au/research-hub-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccine
- Victorian Department of Health COVID-19 vaccine information for health care workers: coronavirus.vic.gov.au/information-health-care-workers-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccine
- Adverse events following immunisation reporting in Victoria: health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation/adverse-events-following-immunisation-reporting
- General immunisation information on the Victorian Better Health Channel: betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/immunisation
- Vaccine safety information in different languages via the World Health Organization: [who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/vaccines-and-immunization-vaccine-safety](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/vaccines-and-immunization-vaccine-safety)

Contact us

For more information on the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine in Victoria, contact the Victorian Department of Health COVID-19 Vaccination Preparedness Unit by emailing COVIDvaccination@dhhs.vic.gov.au <COVIDvaccination@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

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 <COVIDvaccination@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

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