



# When and how to refer COVID-19 vaccine patients to VicSIS

Factsheet for primary care providers Version 4

20 January 2021

**OFFICIAL**

## Key points

- Only medical practitioners may refer patients to VicSIS.
- VicSIS clinics support safe administration and advice for COVID-19 vaccines.
- VicSIS reviews are for people who are at higher risk of severe adverse events to a COVID-19 vaccine or those who have experienced a significant adverse event following receipt of a COVID-19 vaccine.
- VicSIS will only review patients with allergies to COVID-19 vaccines or their ingredients (referrals for allergies to food, multiple drugs, latex etc. will be declined).
- As with all specialist services, occasionally there can be wait times to see a specialist, VicSIS triages appointments based on urgency.
- Submitting referrals to VicSIS for patients that do not meet criteria delays patients who can be vaccinated safely in the community from doing so. It also causes delays for other patients who require VicSIS support.
- Abuse of healthcare workers and VicSIS clinic staff will not be tolerated.
- VicSIS will not accept referrals purely for an exemption.

## Delivering COVID-19 vaccines safely

The [Victorian Specialist Immunisation Services \(VicSIS\)](#) support vaccine providers to safely administer COVID-19 vaccines. They provide specialised advice for people who are at higher risk of adverse events following vaccination – this ensures these people receive a COVID-19 vaccine as safely as possible. VicSIS also advises on patients who have had an adverse event after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

## When to refer patients to VicSIS

### Adult and paediatric referral reasons:

1. Significant adverse event following immunisation (AEFI)\* post dose of a COVID-19 vaccine e.g. anaphylaxis. Please ensure that management of serious medical issues are not delayed pending a VICSIS appointment
2. Anaphylaxis or immediate generalised allergic reaction (without anaphylaxis) to any component of the COVID-19 vaccine to be administered or a history of multiple allergic reactions to other medications containing PEG.
3. Mastocytosis with recurrent anaphylaxis that requires treatment

4. Recent (i.e. within the past 3 months) inflammatory cardiac illness (e.g. myocarditis), acute rheumatic fever or acute rheumatic heart disease (i.e. with active myocardial inflammation) or acute decompensated heart failure. Please see [ATAGI guidance on Myocarditis and Pericarditis](#)
5. Previous serious\* AEFI to a non-COVID-19 vaccine\*\* which is causing hesitancy in completing COVID-19 vaccination
6. Severe needle phobia (**Paediatric referrals only** - please note that all avenues for addressing needle phobia should be exhausted before referral to VicSIS) for patients above 16 years old, they may access the DLO pathway for in hospital vaccination

\*An AEFI is considered significant if it is life-threatening, requires in-patient hospitalisation or prolongation of existing hospitalisation, deemed clinically significant, results in persistent or significant disability/incapacity, or requires intervention to prevent permanent impairment or damage

\*\*Please note: Patients who have experienced a previous allergy to a non-COVID-19 vaccination may be referred to any allergy service. If they are referred to VicSIS they will be offered a non-urgent appointment in mid-2022. As previous anaphylaxis/allergy to a non-COVID-19 vaccine is not a contraindication to COVID-19 vaccination, individuals in this position are encouraged to proceed with COVID-19 vaccination. Other types of allergy (eg. food, latex or venom allergies) do not require a VicSIS referral – vaccines can be safely administered within the community with a routine 15-minute observation period.

## How to refer eligible patients to VicSIS

- All referrals to VicSIS must be completed via the VicSIS eReferral with all fields completed. The eReferral is linked on the [VicSIS webpage](#).
- **All referrals must be made by a Medical Practitioner.**
- Referrals without clear rationale for referral and/or insufficient background medical history will not be triaged until more information is provided.

## Needle phobia for people 16 years and older

VicSIS is not accepting referrals for patients with needle phobia who are aged 16 years and over. Those with severe needle phobia over 16 years old can access a pathway into a hospital to receive a COVID-19 vaccine through the Disability Liaison Officers (DLO) pathway. This pathway provides support to both adults with a disability as well as those with severe needle phobia.

The Melbourne Vaccination Education Centre (MVEC) website has some valuable resources and strategies for people who experience needle phobias which can be found here:

<https://mvec.mcri.edu.au/references/needle-phobia/>. To access the DLO pathway please email requests through to [DLOcoordinator@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:DLOcoordinator@dhhs.vic.gov.au)

## Mandates and exemptions

[Vaccine exemptions](#) can only be provided by an [approved list of health care professionals](#) to individuals who meet a limited set of criteria. COVID-19 vaccines are not mandatory for children. Referrals to VicSIS for the purposes of a medical exemption to COVID-19 vaccination will be rejected.

More information on vaccine mandates and exemptions can be found at [MVEC: COVID-19 mandatory vaccination directions in Victoria](#).

## What happens after an eReferral is submitted?

Once you submit a VicSIS eReferral, it is then reviewed by our VicSIS Central team. If the referral meets criteria, the eReferral will be sent to the appropriate VicSIS clinic based on geographical location and/or speciality, for triage.

**If a patient is known to a health service with an associated VicSIS clinic, please indicate this in the referral to assist with referral allocation.** It can take 2-4 weeks for a response. Please advise patients of this timeline to manage expectations. Thank you for your patience.

## Current VicSIS clinics

**VicSIS is comprised of eleven COVID-19 Specialist Immunisation Clinics, some sites also offer Paediatric services, Paediatric sedation and Allergy specific services.**

- Albury Wodonga Health
- Alfred Health
- Austin Health
- Barwon Health- Geelong
- Bendigo Health
- Monash Health
- Northern Health
- Peter McCallum Cancer Centre
- Royal Children's Hospital
- Royal Melbourne Hospital
- Western Health- Sunshine hospital

## Reporting Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI)

### Mild, common or expected AEFI

You do not need to routinely report:

- Minor, common or expected side effects
- These may include pain, redness, swelling and tenderness at the injection site, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, nausea, fever and chills, feeling unwell or joint pain
- For further details of minor, common or expected side effects to National Immunisation Program (NIP) and influenza vaccines refer to Vaccine Side Effects
- For further details of minor, common and expected side effects following COVID-19 vaccines refer to the Commonwealth resources: [After your AstraZeneca \(VAXZEVRIA\) Vaccine](#), [After your Pfizer \(COMIRNATY\) vaccine](#) and [After your Moderna \(SPIKEVAX\) vaccine](#)

### Serious or unexpected AEFI

- All medically attended AEFI to be reported to SAEFVIC via online reporting at [www.saefvic.org.au](http://www.saefvic.org.au) or by using the QR code.
  - Medically attended events are defined as a visit to general practitioner, emergency department, or hospital admission
  - If the adverse event is serious, IMMEDIATE notification is also required – see red box (below)
- Any event felt to be significant following immunisation, regardless of whether you think the symptoms were related to the vaccine or not
- Any expected symptoms that have not gone away after a few days
- Any side effects following an immunisation which requires assessment by a doctor or nurse
- Suspected shoulder injury related to vaccine administration (SIRVA)
- Any immunisation administration errors



Serious or unexpected AEFI require urgent direct notification in addition to routine reporting online [SAEFVIC form](#). Please ensure that management of serious medical issues are not delayed pending a VIC SIS appointment.

### Serious adverse events requiring urgent reporting

AEFI that result in:

- Transfer to hospital care
- CPR
- Defibrillator use
- Life-threatening incidents
- Death

Vaccine administration errors

**1. Manage the AEFI by usual clinical pathways**

**2. Immediately notify via phone:**

- Business hours (Mon – Fri, 9AM – 5PM)  
Call SAEFVIC **1300 882 924** (Option 1)
- Out of Hours  
Call Victorian Vaccine Control Centre (VVCC)  
**1800 675 398** (Options 3-1-2)

**3. Submit an AEFI report online to [SAEFVIC](#)**

## More information and resources

- [ATAGI guideline on the Primary Care approach to TTS after AstraZeneca](#)
- [Patient Factsheet on Moderna \(Spikevax\)](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination – After your AstraZeneca vaccine](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination – After your Pfizer \(COMIRNATY\) vaccine](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination - After your Moderna vaccine](#)
- [MVEC: SAEFVIC](#)
- [MVEC: COVID-19 vaccines and allergy](#)
- [MVEC: COVID-19 FAQs: allergies, side effects and safety](#)
- [MVEC: COVID-19 vaccine adverse events](#)
- [MVEC: COVID-19 vaccines in people with immunocompromise](#)
- [MVEC: Immunisation recommendations for the older population](#)
- The [VicSIS page on the MVEC website](#) has the following documents:
  - VicSIS eReferral
  - Clinician referral guide to VicSIS
  - Guidance for differentiating anaphylaxis and acute stress response for vaccine providers

To receive this document in another format, phone 1300 651 160, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email [COVIDVaccination@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:COVIDVaccination@health.vic.gov.au) <COVIDVaccination@health.vic.gov.au>.

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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