

## Frequently asked questions

### ABOUT THE VACCINE

#### WHY IS THE VACCINE IMPORTANT?

COVID-19 can cause serious illness, ongoing health conditions, and sometimes death. The vaccines are designed to ensure that if you do catch COVID-19, you do not get seriously ill.

There is also growing evidence that vaccinated people are less infectious if they do catch COVID-19. This means getting vaccinated is the best way you can protect yourself, your loved ones and our community.

#### HOW DO THE COVID-19 VACCINES WORK?

The COVID-19 vaccines work by preparing the body to defend itself against COVID-19.

When a person is given the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, some of their cells will read the vaccine's mRNA instructions and temporarily produce the spike protein, which mimics the COVID-19 virus. The person's immune system will then recognise this protein as foreign and produce antibodies and activate T cells (white blood cells) to attack it.

When a person is given the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, some of their cells will be "infected" by a dead adenovirus (common cold) carrying the DNA for the spike protein, which mimics the COVID-19 virus. The person's immune system will then recognise this protein as foreign and produce antibodies and activate T cells (white blood cells) to attack it.

Once vaccinated, if a person comes into contact with COVID-19, their immune system will recognise it and be ready to defend the body against it having already been exposed to the vaccine.

As a result, you will be less likely to have severe COVID-19 symptoms after a vaccination.

#### HOW DO THE COVID-19 VACCINES PROTECT ME?

The goal of vaccination is to stop you from getting sick.

The COVID-19 vaccines train your immune system to recognise COVID-19. They have been designed to help you fight off COVID-19 before it makes you sick, and to reduce the severity of your symptoms if you do get sick.

Most vaccines work in this way. This is why it's so important that everyone gets vaccinated.

During clinical trials of the COVID-19 vaccines, research focussed on whether the vaccines helped produce enough antibodies to stop us from getting sick. The ones that did this safely and effectively have been approved for use.

Now that the vaccines are being rolled out world-wide, early research suggests they may also be able to reduce how infectious we are if we do catch COVID-19, which could help stop or reduce the spread of the virus.

It is very important that we continue practising good hygiene, using the COVID SAfe Check-In, physical distancing, and getting tested and staying home if you are unwell, especially during the roll out of the vaccination program.

## WHAT'S IN THE COVID-19 VACCINES?

Vaccine ingredients vary depending on what the vaccine is for. Generally, vaccines may contain some of the following ingredients:

- > a protein component of a virus
- > a piece of genetic code (DNA or mRNA)
- > a very small dose of a weakened virus
- > a substance to boost the immune response (an adjuvant)
- > a small amount of preservative
- > sterile salt water (saline) for injections.

Ingredients for the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia will be listed in the [Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods](#).

## DO THE VACCINES CONTAIN ANY ANIMAL PRODUCTS?

The approved COVID-19 vaccines do not contain any animal products or egg.

## CAN THE VACCINE GIVE ME COVID-19?

No, the COVID-19 vaccines do not use the live or whole virus that causes COVID-19.

## CAN I CATCH COVID-19 EVEN IF I'VE HAD THE VACCINE?

Yes. The goal of vaccination is to stop you from getting sick. The COVID-19 vaccines train your immune system to recognise COVID-19. They have been designed to help you fight off COVID-19 before it makes you sick, and to reduce the severity of your symptoms if you do get sick.

Most vaccines work in this way. This is why it's so important that everyone gets vaccinated. There's growing evidence that vaccinated people are less infectious if they do catch COVID-19, which means getting vaccinated is the best way you can protect yourself and your loved ones.

It's also important to continue practising good hygiene, using the COVID SAfe Check-In, physical distancing, and getting tested and staying home if you are unwell, especially during the roll out of the vaccination program.

## IF I CATCH COVID-19 AFTER I HAVE THE VACCINE, CAN I PASS THE INFECTION ONTO OTHERS?

Early research indicates that the vaccines may be able to reduce how infectious we are if we do catch COVID-19. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) will continue to monitor the ongoing research to understand whether the vaccines can stop a person passing the virus onto another person.

This is why it's important that even if you have been vaccinated, you should continue practising good hygiene, using the COVID SAfe Check-In, physical distancing, and getting tested and staying home if you are unwell.

## DO I STILL NEED TO PRACTICE HAND HYGIENE AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING EVEN IF I'VE BEEN VACCINATED?

It is very important that we continue practising good hygiene, using the COVID SAfe Check-In, physical distancing, and getting tested and staying home if you are unwell, especially during the roll out of the vaccine program, which will take several months.

Australia will still need to have the flexible strategies already in place to control COVID-19. If the vaccine program is effective and results in a high proportion of people being vaccinated, it is hoped that we will be able to reduce some of these control measures. This is likely to be a slow process and will rely on many people being willing to have the vaccine.

## HOW LONG DOES THE VACCINE PROTECT ME FROM GETTING COVID-19?

Clinical trials have shown that the COVID-19 vaccines protect against COVID-19 symptoms and severe disease after a person receives two doses. At this stage, there is not enough information to understand the long term protection against COVID-19 after vaccination. Booster doses may be required, similar to other vaccinations, such as the flu vaccine.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) will continue to monitor the ongoing research to understand how the vaccines work over time. This is why it's important that even if you have been vaccinated, you should continue practising good hygiene, using the COVID SAfe Check-In, physical distancing, and getting tested and staying home if you are unwell.

## WILL THE VACCINE REDUCE THE SPREAD OF TRANSMISSION OF THE VIRUS?

The COVID-19 vaccines train your immune system to recognise COVID-19. They have been designed to help you fight off COVID-19 before it makes you sick, and to reduce the severity of your symptoms if you do get sick.

Most vaccines work in this way. This is why it's so important that everyone gets vaccinated.

During clinical trials of the COVID-19 vaccines, research focussed on whether the vaccines helped produce enough antibodies to stop us from getting sick. The ones that did this safely and effectively have been approved for use.

Now that the vaccines are being rolled out world-wide, early research suggests they may also be able to reduce how infectious we are if we do catch COVID-19, which could help stop or reduce the spread of the virus.

It is very important that we continue practising good hygiene, using the COVID SAfe Check-In, physical distancing, and getting tested and staying home if you are unwell, especially during the roll out of the vaccination program.

## DO I STILL NEED TO QUARANTINE WHEN I ARRIVE IN AUSTRALIA IF I'VE BEEN VACCINATED OVERSEAS?

Anyone travelling to Australia from overseas will still need to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival, even if they've been vaccinated against COVID-19.

If you're coming to Australia, you also need to have a negative COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test result 72 hours or less before the scheduled departure time of your flight (or your first flight if you have a connecting flight during your journey to Australia).

You need to provide evidence of your negative result when you check in at the airport and carry this while you're travelling.

There are a few exemptions from pre-departure testing — such as where PCR testing is not reasonably available.

## WHEN WILL I BE ABLE TO TRAVEL AFTER GETTING THE VACCINE?

It is expected that travel will resume when enough of the global population has been vaccinated against COVID-19. You can do your part to speed things up by getting vaccinated when it's your turn.

At some point, our international borders will open again. With that comes an increased risk that COVID-19 will become active in our community. Now is the time to prepare for the future and ensure that we're all protected and ready for international travel. For more information, visit [Smart Traveller](#).

## ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS?

Vaccines, like any other medication or natural therapy, can have reactions or side effects. The extent and severity of side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines are similar to those from other vaccines. As part of regulatory assessment of all vaccines, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) considers information

about possible side effects. For a vaccine to be registered for use in Australia, the benefits must outweigh the risks.

You may experience minor reactions or side effects following vaccination. Most reactions or side effects last no more than a couple of days and do not require special treatment. Serious reactions like allergic reactions are extremely rare.

Vaccines are monitored for a long time and even after a vaccine is given, it is still monitored for safety. Healthcare professionals contribute to ongoing monitoring by informing the TGA of any side effects, even if they are very minor. This means the TGA can oversee the safety of a vaccine across the country and, in the unlikely event that there is a safety risk, inform healthcare providers, the community and the Government as soon as possible.

Common reactions to the COVID-19 vaccines include:

- > tenderness, pain and swelling at the injection site
- > tiredness
- > headache
- > muscle and joint pain
- > chills
- > fever.

Some people may also experience redness at the injection site, nausea, itching at the injection site, pain in the limb, enlarged lymph nodes, difficulty sleeping or generally feel unwell.

An extremely rare blood clotting syndrome, Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), has been linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The clotting condition occurs between four and 20 days after the first dose of vaccine. During this time, please seek medical attention immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- > shortness of breath
- > chest pain
- > swelling in your leg
- > persistent abdominal (belly) pain
- > neurological symptoms, including severe and persistent headaches or blurred vision
- > tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the site of injection.

You can use the [COVID-19 Vaccine Side Effect Checker](#) if you have concerns about any symptoms after having either of the COVID-19 vaccines. If you have any general questions or concerns, you can also call the National COVID-19 Vaccine Helpline 24 hours a day on 1800 020 080.

Reporting reactions and side effects is an essential part of ensuring ongoing vaccine safety monitoring. If you experience side effects from the vaccine, you can let your vaccine provider know and they can report them on your behalf.

### **WHY DO VACCINES CAUSE REACTIONS OR SIDE EFFECTS?**

Reactions or side effects, such as fever and tiredness, from vaccines are often a really good sign that your immune system has been activated and is learning how to fight the disease you've been vaccinated against.

### **WHAT ARE SOME OF THE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS I MIGHT EXPERIENCE AFTER MY COVID-19 VACCINE?**

You may experience some side effects following vaccination. Most side effects last no more than a couple of days and you will recover without any problems.

Common reactions to vaccination include pain, redness and/or swelling where you received the needle, mild fever, headache and flu-like symptoms.

Serious reactions such as allergic reactions are extremely rare.

You can use the [COVID-19 Vaccine Side Effect Checker](#) if you have concerns about any symptoms after having either of the COVID-19 vaccines. If you have any general questions or concerns, you can also call the National COVID-19 Vaccine Helpline 24 hours a day on 1800 020 080.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE HAD A BAD REACTION TO THE COVID-19 VACCINE?**

As with any medication, very rarely a severe allergic reaction may occur. If it does, it will generally occur within 15 minutes of the vaccination.

If a reaction or side effect seems severe or persists for more than 3 or 4 days, you develop new or unexpected symptoms, or you are concerned, seek medical attention.

You can use the [COVID-19 Vaccine Side Effect Checker](#) if you have concerns about any symptoms after having either of the COVID-19 vaccines. If you have any general questions or concerns, you can also call the National COVID-19 Vaccine Helpline 24 hours a day on 1800 020 080.

Reporting reactions and side effects is an essential part of ensuring ongoing vaccine safety monitoring. If you experience side effects from the vaccine, you can let your vaccine provider know and they can report them on your behalf.

### **I'M CONCERNED THAT I'VE HAD A BAD REACTION TO THE COVID-19 VACCINE - WHEN SHOULD I SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION?**

See your doctor or health care professional as soon as possible or go directly to a hospital if:

- > you have a reaction that you consider severe or unexpected
- > you are concerned about your condition after vaccination.

Seek medical attention immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- > shortness of breath
- > chest pain
- > swelling in your leg
- > persistent abdominal (belly) pain
- > neurological symptoms, including severe and persistent headaches or blurred vision
- > tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the site of injection.

### **DO THE COVID-19 VACCINES WORK ON NEW VARIANTS?**

It is anticipated that the COVID-19 vaccines will be effective against the newer strains of COVID-19.

This is because the vaccines work by inducing what is known as a "polyclonal" response – a collection of immunological responses to many different parts of the COVID-19 "spike" protein. In the new variants, only a limited part of the spike protein is changed, and much is unchanged, so the vaccines should still work against the main, unchanged parts to the COVID-19 spike protein.

The Australian Government will continue to closely monitor developments and do their own genetic examination of any local cases.

### **DO THE COVID-19 VACCINES CAUSE BLOOD CLOTS?**

Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) is a rare and new syndrome which has been reported after being given the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine. It may be caused by this vaccine. The condition involves blood clots (occurring in body sites like the brain or abdomen) together with low platelet levels.

The condition is extremely rare, affecting an estimated four to six people for every million people who receive the first dose of the vaccine.

ATAGI recommends that the Pfizer vaccine is preferred over the AstraZeneca vaccine in adults aged under 50 years. This recommendation is based on the increasing risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 in older adults (and hence a higher benefit from vaccination) and a potentially increased risk of thrombosis with thrombocytopenia following the AstraZeneca vaccine in those under 50 years.

The AstraZeneca vaccine can be used in adults aged under 50 years where the benefits are likely to outweigh the risks for that individual and the person has made an informed decision based on an understanding of the risks and benefits.

Almost all (one case in the UK) of the cases of TTS reported to date have occurred after the first dose of the vaccine. People who have had the first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine without any serious adverse effects can be confident in getting their second dose, including adults under 50 years.

## SAFETY, TESTING AND TRIALS

### HOW IS A VACCINE APPROVED FOR USE IN AUSTRALIA?

The COVID-19 vaccines being used in Australia have been approved by the Australian Government's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and administered under the advice of the [COVID-19 Vaccine and Treatments for Australia – Science and Industry Technical Advisory Group](#) and the [Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation \(ATAGI\)](#).

Before any vaccine is registered for use, it is tested extensively during development and then in thousands of people. Testing begins with laboratory research, then animal studies and finally human clinical trials. Clinical trials involve testing the vaccine in volunteers, and are conducted in phases.

Before any vaccine is approved for use in Australia, including a COVID-19 vaccine, it must pass the TGA's rigorous assessment and approval processes. This includes assessment of its safety, quality and effectiveness.

The TGA is actively monitoring COVID-19 vaccine development both in Australia and around the world, and is also part of a network of international regulators that meet regularly to discuss the development of COVID-19 vaccines.

The TGA is engaging early with vaccine developers, undertaking a thorough and efficient review of vaccine candidates and discussing the application process. Early engagement will not affect the comprehensive review process that clinical trial results are subject to in Australia.

### ARE THE COVID-19 VACCINES SAFE?

The COVID-19 vaccines are thoroughly tested for safety before they are approved for use in Australia. This includes careful analysis of clinical trial data, ingredients, chemistry, manufacturing and other factors.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approves all COVID-19 vaccines being used in Australia to ensure that extremely high safety standards are met. The vaccines available do not use the live or whole virus that causes COVID-19.

With hundreds of millions of people vaccinated globally with these vaccines, real-world data is now showing high effectiveness for both vaccines.

Real-world data has also uncovered an extremely rare blood clotting syndrome, which may be linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine. The TGA and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) responded quickly to this real-world data, updating their advice to provide new guidelines for the use of AstraZeneca in Australia.

We can be confident that both vaccines are safe and provide protection against serious illness and death from COVID-19.

### IS ANYBODY MONITORING THE SAFETY OF THE VACCINES IN AUSTRALIA?

In addition to providing approval for the COVID-19 vaccines to be used in Australia, the Therapeutic Goods Association (TGA) tests every batch of COVID-19 vaccines – checking how potent they are ensuring they have not been contaminated – before they are dispatched for delivery.



Vaccine recipients may also be followed up with an automated text message three days and then eight days after your vaccination. You may be asked if you have had any side effects, and the information will contribute to AusVaxSafety's national COVID-19 vaccine safety surveillance.

[AusVaxSafety](#) is a world-leading national vaccine safety system, led by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance.

The TGA and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) are both monitoring the safety of the vaccines in Australia and overseas, and have already updated their advice to ensure the safety of all Australians.

### **HOW WERE THE COVID-19 VACCINES DEVELOPED AND APPROVED IN A SHORT TIMEFRAME?**

All available resources and efforts have been directed towards finding an effective vaccine, due to the urgency of protecting people from the COVID-19 virus.

Some of the reasons behind this rapid progress include:

- > Unprecedented levels of funding and collaboration between vaccine developers and governments around the world. Planning has been undertaken early, such as investing in manufacturing facilities before a vaccine is even available.
- > Technology has evolved to make vaccine development faster than in the past. To develop a vaccine, scientists need to understand the virus's genetic code. New technology has allowed researchers to quickly identify the genetic code of the COVID-19 virus, soon after the virus emerged. This allowed scientists around the world to start work in designing and building vaccines.
- > Clinical trials progress more quickly if a disease is widespread, which is the case for COVID-19. This means researchers can evaluate the effect of a vaccine between the unvaccinated and vaccinated groups much sooner than for a rare disease.

### **WHY WERE THE COVID-19 VACCINES AVAILABLE EARLIER OVERSEAS?**

Some countries have used emergency use authorisation to roll the COVID-19 vaccine out more quickly. Emergency use authorisation is not a full approval of a vaccine. In countries facing significant COVID-19 outbreaks, the benefits of rolling out a vaccine before full regulatory assessment may outweigh the risk of waiting for a full analysis.

Due to the proactive management of COVID-19 in Australia, we have been able to wait for the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to make an assessment through the provisional registration pathway. This allows the TGA to undertake its comprehensive regulatory assessment of the safety and effectiveness of vaccine candidates.

### **WHAT WAS INVOLVED IN COVID-19 VACCINE TRIALS?**

Before any vaccine is registered for use, it is tested extensively during development and then in thousands of people. Testing begins with laboratory research, then animal studies and finally human clinical trials. Clinical trials involve testing the vaccine in volunteers, and are conducted in phases.

Clinical trials must provide scientific evidence which demonstrates that the benefits of a vaccine greatly outweigh any risks.

There are different types of clinical trials:

- > Phase 1 clinical trials usually include a few dozen healthy adult volunteers. They focus primarily on establishing that the vaccine is safe, and on demonstrating that the vaccine induces an immune response.
- > Phase 2 clinical trials have hundreds of volunteers, and can include specific groups the vaccine is intended for. These trials aim to test whether the vaccine causes an immune response and confirm that it is safe with minor side effects.
- > Phase 3 clinical trials include many thousands of participants. They aim to test whether a vaccine is effective in preventing people from getting the disease – in this case COVID-19. Phase 3 trials also

thoroughly assess the vaccine for safety and side effects. Researchers usually compare data between vaccinated people and those who received a placebo. They compare the frequency of infection, disease severity and any reported side effects between the two groups.

For COVID-19 vaccines, some of these phases have been combined. For example, in Phase 1 and 2 trials, results are analysed after the first few dozen volunteers are studied. The trial then proceeds in hundreds more people. Some Phase 3 studies have started once preliminary data from Phase 1 and 2 trials are available. Having these 'overlapping' timeframes has helped develop COVID-19 vaccines quickly, to make them available earlier to save lives.

### **DOES PRIORITY ACCESS TO THE VACCINE ALSO MEAN THAT IT IS BEING TRIALLED ON ME?**

No. The vaccines have been through clinical trials and have been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for use in Australia through a rigorous assessment and approval processes. This includes assessment of their safety, quality and effectiveness.

Over 1 billion people across the world have now received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

### **WHAT CHECKS ARE IN PLACE TO ENSURE PEOPLE RECEIVE THE CORRECT DOSAGE OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE?**

The person vaccinating you will have completed COVID-19 vaccination training. In South Australia, two trained staff members check the dosage prior to vaccination as an additional safety measure.

The Australian Government partnered with the Australian College of Nursing to develop and deliver the accredited training modules. This will ensure vaccinators can safely manage and administer COVID-19 vaccines.

## **GETTING VACCINATED FOR COVID-19**

### **WHY SHOULD I GET VACCINATED?**

We strongly encourage you to get vaccinated as COVID-19 can cause serious ongoing health conditions, and sometimes death. Getting vaccinated is the best way you can protect yourself and your loved ones against COVID-19.

### **DO I HAVE TO GET A COVID-19 VACCINE?**

Getting vaccinated is not mandatory. However, we strongly encourage you to get vaccinated as COVID-19 can cause serious ongoing health conditions, and sometimes death. Getting vaccinated is the best way you can protect yourself and your loved ones against COVID-19.

### **ARE COVID-19 VACCINES FREE?**

The first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccines will be free for all people living in Australia.

### **IS RECEIVING A COVID-19 VACCINE VOLUNTARY?**

Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine is completely voluntary, however, it is strongly encouraged.

### **WHICH COVID-19 VACCINES ARE AVAILABLE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA?**

COVID-19 vaccines by Pfizer and AstraZeneca are currently available in South Australia.

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine can be used in people aged 16 and older. This vaccine requires two doses, 21 days apart. Detailed information can be found on the [TGA website](#). The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is preferred over the AstraZeneca vaccine for people aged between 16 to 50 years.

The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine requires two doses, with the second dose recommended to be administered 12 weeks after the first. Detailed information can be found on the [TGA website](#).



The Australian Government has secured doses of other COVID-19 vaccines, including those produced by Novavax, which are still subject to TGA approvals and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advice. More information can be found on the [Department of Health website](#).

### **DO I GET TO CHOOSE WHAT TYPE OF VACCINE I GET?**

You will receive the vaccine available at the time and location of your appointment. The vaccine you receive may also be determined by your health, age or occupation (if your occupation puts you at a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19).

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is preferred over the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in adults aged under 50 years who have not already received a first dose of AstraZeneca vaccine.

### **SHOULD I AVOID BEING VACCINATED IF I FEEL UNWELL?**

If you are unwell with symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, cough, or a runny nose, you should get tested for COVID-19 and isolate until you receive your results.

If you have received a negative COVID-19 test result and only have a mild fever, you can still be vaccinated. If you have a high fever, you should delay your vaccination until you are well.

If you've tested positive to COVID-19, or you are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, please remain in quarantine and do not attend your vaccine appointment.

It's important to reschedule your appointment as soon as you are able to attend.

### **WHAT PHASE OF THE VACCINATION ROLLOUT ARE WE IN NOW?**

Currently people in Phase 1a and Phase 1b are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Phase 1a commenced 22 February and includes:

- > Quarantine and airport workers
- > Frontline at-risk health care workers including staff in GP respiratory clinics and COVID-19 testing and processing facilities, ICU and emergency department frontline staff and volunteers, paramedics and ambulance staff
- > Residential aged care and disability care staff
- > Residential aged care and disability care residents

Phase 1b commenced 22 March and includes:

- > Adults over 70 years
- > All other health care workers
- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults over 50 years
- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults living in eligible remote areas
- > Adults with a [specific underlying medical condition](#)
- > Critical and high risk workers including defence, police, fire, emergency services and meat processing
- > Certain eligible people with a disability and carers

To find out which phase of the rollout you'll be in and if you can book a COVID-19 vaccination, visit the [Australian Government's Vaccine Eligibility Checker](#) or call the National COVID-19 Vaccine Information Line on 1800 020 080.

### **IS ASTHMA PART OF THE PHASE 1B ROLLOUT?**

Phase 1b does not include people living with mild or moderate asthma. For more information, speak to your GP about your asthma management plan and when you should be vaccinated.

A list of underlying medical conditions is available on the [SA Health website](#).

## HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN IT'S MY TURN TO GET VACCINATED?

Information will be provided to priority groups and the wider South Australian community when the vaccine becomes available to each group. This information may come from the Commonwealth or from SA Health.

## WHERE CAN I GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA?

If you are over 50 and are eligible under Phase 1a or 1b, you can book an appointment at a GP clinic, Respiratory Clinic, and certain regional SA Health hospital clinics. You can find a clinic near you by using the [Australian Government's Vaccine Eligibility Checker](#) or call the National COVID-19 Vaccine Information Line on 1800 020 080.

Dedicated COVID-19 vaccination clinics are being established across metro and regional South Australia to vaccinate people under 50 in Phase 1a and Phase 1b. Eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults can also book appointments at selected Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and Aboriginal Health Services.

## WHO WILL BE ADMINISTERING MY VACCINE? HAVE THEY HAD TRAINING?

You could get your COVID-19 vaccine from a doctor, nurse, pharmacist or other health care worker.

The person vaccinating you will have completed COVID-19 vaccination training to ensure they can safely manage and administer COVID-19 vaccines.

The training has been made available for:

- > health professionals in hospitals
- > general practices
- > state and Commonwealth vaccination clinics
- > Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations
- > pharmacies.

## WHAT DO I NEED TO DO BEFORE I RECEIVE MY COVID-19 VACCINE?

Before you attend your appointment it's important to make sure that your details are fully up to date with Medicare. You can do this a couple of ways – either through your online account on MyGov, the Express Medicare Plus App or you can call Medicare on 132 011.

People who are not eligible for Medicare can still get the COVID-19 vaccine for free.

Those eligible in [Phase 1a and Phase 1b](#) can currently get the free vaccine at GP-led Respiratory Clinics, with no requirement for a Medicare card.

More options may be available in later stages of the COVID-19 vaccination rollout.

## WHAT SHOULD I BRING TO MY COVID-19 VACCINATION APPOINTMENT?

If you have a Medicare card, you will need to bring your card to your appointment. If you do not have a Medicare card, please bring some form of photo ID.

The vaccine will be administered by a doctor, nurse or other health care worker. Everyone providing the vaccine will have completed COVID-19 vaccination training.

The length of appointment will depend on your individual and health circumstances. If based on your personal circumstances, you know that you may need longer please account for that in your planning. Most people will need to allow at least 30 minutes for their appointment.

## WHAT IS THE TIMING BETWEEN THE TWO VACCINATIONS?

When you get your first dose of the vaccine, you will be asked to make your appointment to get your second dose. Depending on the vaccine you are given, the second dose will be administered either 21 days or 12 weeks after your first dose.

## **DO I HAVE TO GET MY SECOND DOSE OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE AT THE SAME PLACE I GOT MY FIRST DOSE?**

You should try to have your second dose at the same location to your first dose.

The most important thing is that you are getting the same type of vaccine, and that you receive your second dose the recommended length of time after your first dose.

We recommend bringing a hard copy of your vaccination record as proof that you've had your first dose administered.

## **CAN I GET A DIFFERENT VACCINE FOR THE SECOND DOSE?**

The vaccination course is two doses of the same vaccine. The vaccines are not interchangeable, and the two-dose course must be completed with the same vaccine.

## **HOW LONG WILL THE COVID-19 VACCINE LAST ONCE I HAVE HAD TWO DOSES?**

It is not yet known how long the protection of the COVID-19 vaccine will last, but ongoing research is being conducted to monitor people's protection over time. This research will also determine whether booster doses may be required.

## **CAN I GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE AND THE FLU VACCINE AT THE SAME TIME?**

The recommended minimum interval between a dose of seasonal flu vaccine and a dose of either of the currently approved COVID-19 vaccines is 14 days either side of the flu vaccine.

Speak to your GP for more information.

## **CAN I BRING SOMEONE TO MY VACCINATION APPOINTMENT WITH ME?**

You can have someone attend your vaccination appointment for support. This can be a support worker, family member, carer or friend.

## **IF CONSENT IS GIVEN IN ADVANCE, CAN IT BE WITHDRAWN ON THE DAY OF THE VACCINE?**

Yes, receiving the COVID-19 vaccine is completely voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time prior to receiving the first or second dose of the vaccine.

## **WHEN CAN I RETURN TO WORK AFTER GETTING THE VACCINE?**

The COVID-19 vaccine is not mandatory in Australia, so you should be able to work before and after being vaccinated.

You may experience some mild side effects after having the vaccine, which is a sign that your immune system is kicking into gear and learning how to fight COVID-19. These side effects may make you feel unwell for a couple of days.

If you're worried about being too unwell to return to work, consider booking your appointment at the end of your shift if you're getting it at work or ahead of the weekend or a day off.

## **WHAT IF I FEEL UNWELL AFTER MY VACCINE?**

The Australian Immunisation Handbook, developed by The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), provides clinical guidelines for healthcare professionals and others about using vaccines safely and effectively.

The Handbook recommends that:

- > all vaccine recipients be observed for at least 15 minutes after they have been vaccinated, to ensure that they do not experience an immediate adverse event, and to provide rapid medical care if needed.
- > people with a history of anaphylaxis to non-vaccine antigens (e.g. food, insect stings, medicines) should be observed for 30 minutes following administration of a COVID-19 vaccine dose.

You may also experience some side effects after your vaccination. Use the COVID-19 vaccine side effects symptom checker if you have concerns about any symptoms after your vaccine. The checker is also available through the National Coronavirus Helpline, 1800 020 080, 24 hours a day.

The COVID-19 vaccine side effects symptom checker is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a medical professional for serious symptoms or emergencies.

See your doctor or health care professional as soon as possible or go directly to a hospital if:

- > you have a reaction that you consider severe or unexpected
- > you are concerned about your condition after vaccination.

Seek medical attention immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- > shortness of breath
- > chest pain
- > swelling in your leg
- > persistent abdominal (belly) pain
- > neurological symptoms, including severe and persistent headaches or blurred vision
- > tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the site of injection.

Reporting your side effects is an essential part of ensuring ongoing vaccine safety monitoring. If you experience side effects from the vaccine, you can let your vaccine provider know and they can report them on your behalf.

#### **WILL I BE CONTACTED AFTER MY APPOINTMENT?**

Vaccine recipients may be followed up with an automated text message three days and then eight days after the vaccine. You will be asked if you have had any side effects, and the information will contribute to AusVaxSafety's national COVID-19 vaccine safety surveillance.

[AusVaxSafety](#) is a world-leading national vaccine safety system, led by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance.

#### **WILL I GET A RECORD OF MY VACCINATION?**

If you receive your COVID-19 vaccination in South Australia, you will be given an official hard copy record of your vaccination. Your vaccination information will be recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register.

Australians can access their immunisation history statement through Medicare for proof of vaccination, both digitally and in hard copy, if required.

People without a Medicare card can request an Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI) from the Australian Government to get an immunisation summary through My Health Record that will provide proof of vaccination.

#### **SHOULD I STILL GET TESTED FOR COVID-19 IF I FEEL UNWELL AFTER RECEIVING THE COVID-19 VACCINE?**

The vaccines are designed to prevent serious illness and death. You cannot catch COVID-19 from the COVID-19 vaccine, but you can still catch COVID-19 after being vaccinated.

For the next day or two following your vaccination, you may feel a little bit feverish, tired, or achy as a side effect of the vaccine. If that happens, you do not need to get a COVID-19 test. If you have symptoms like that, and you also have COVID-19 symptoms such as runny nose, or a sore throat, or a cough, or difficulty breathing, you should get tested for COVID-19 immediately.

These vaccines are going to help to keep us all safe, but it's very important that we continue to follow the advice and any restrictions in place as we vaccinate our community.

## WHO SHOULD GET THE VACCINE

### WHY DOES EVERYONE NEED TO GET VACCINATED?

The COVID-19 vaccinations reduce the community's risk of COVID-19 outbreaks and will help to reduce symptoms and side-effects of COVID-19 if you are exposed.

There's growing evidence that vaccinated people are less infectious if they do catch COVID-19, which means getting vaccinated is the best way you can protect yourself and your loved ones.

### WHO WILL GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

The COVID-19 vaccine is being rolled out in phases across South Australia to ensure priority groups can access the vaccine.

The phases are as follows:

#### Phase 1a

- > Quarantine and airport workers
- > Frontline at-risk health care workers including staff in GP respiratory clinics and COVID-19 testing facilities, ambulance staff, paramedics, ICU and emergency department staff and clinical and ancillary support staff
- > Residential aged care and disability care staff
- > Residential aged care and disability care residents

#### Phase 1b

- > Adults over 70 years
- > All other health care workers
- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults over 50 years
- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults living in eligible remote areas
- > Adults with a [specified underlying medical condition](#)
- > Critical and high risk workers including defence, police, fire, emergency services and meat processing
- > Certain eligible people with a disability and carers

#### Phase 2a

- > Adults over 50 years
- > All other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults
- > Other critical and high risk workers.

#### Phase 2b

- > 16 and 17 year olds (Pfizer is the preferred vaccine for this age group)
- > Balance of adult population
- > Catch up any unvaccinated Australians from previous phases.

#### Phase 3

- > Consideration of people under 16 years, based on further Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approvals and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advice.

### I'M FIT AND HEALTHY – DO I STILL NEED TO GET VACCINATED?

COVID-19 can cause very serious disease, long term health issues, and sometimes death. COVID-19 can be a serious illness for anyone who gets it, including people who are young, fit and otherwise healthy.

There's growing evidence that vaccinated people are less infectious if they do catch COVID-19, which means getting vaccinated is the best way you can protect yourself and your loved ones.

### **I DON'T HAVE A MEDICARE CARD, CAN I STILL GET A COVID-19 VACCINE?**

People who are not eligible for Medicare can still get the COVID-19 vaccine for free.

Those eligible in [Phase 1a and Phase 1b](#) can currently get the free vaccine at GP-led Respiratory Clinics, with no requirement for a Medicare card.

More options may be available in later stages of the COVID-19 vaccination rollout.

### **I WORK IN A HIGH RISK AREA (PRIORITY 1A) BUT DON'T WANT TO GET THE VACCINE, WILL THIS AFFECT MY JOB?**

It's important that people working in high risk areas are given access to the vaccine as early as possible, which is why you've been included in Phase 1a of the national roll out.

Your occupational risk of exposure to COVID-19 should be considered when discussing your role and responsibility with your employer. Individual employers may consider company policies regarding the COVID-19 vaccine that consider occupational health and safety risks.

The vaccine is not mandated by the Australian or State Governments.

### **IS THE VACCINE SAFE FOR OLDER PEOPLE?**

Both COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia are suitable for vaccinating older people.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has stated that older adults should be prioritised for COVID-19 vaccination.

ATAGI has stated that 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 rare instances, additional evaluation may be indicated of the appropriateness of vaccination in very frail individuals with severe pre-existing conditions or at the end of life.

Patients and/or their families, representatives and carers can talk to their GP or a health professional about the COVID-19 vaccines.

### **CAN I GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE IF I AM PLANNING A PREGNANCY, CURRENTLY PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING?**

Clinical trials for new medicines do not typically include pregnant or breastfeeding participants.

If you are planning a pregnancy, you can receive the COVID-19 vaccine. You do not need to avoid becoming pregnant before or after vaccination. You are not required to have a pregnancy test before getting vaccinated.

If you are breastfeeding, you can receive the COVID-19 vaccine at any time. You do not need to stop breastfeeding before or after vaccination.

Currently in Australia we are not routinely recommending COVID-19 vaccination for pregnant women. You and your health professional should consider whether the potential benefits of vaccination outweigh any potential risks.

Further international data regarding this issue is expected to be available soon.

For more information, read the [Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy](#).

### **DO COVID-19 VACCINES CAUSE INFERTILITY?**

There is no evidence suggesting that fertility problems are a side effect of ANY vaccine, including the COVID-19 vaccines.



The Therapeutic Goods Administration will not approve a vaccine for use in Australia unless it is safe and effective. This includes impacts on fertility. There is no evidence that antibodies formed from COVID-19 vaccination cause any problems with pregnancy, including the development of the placenta.

People who are trying to become pregnant now or who plan to try in the future may receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available to them.

For more information, read the [Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy](#).

### **WILL THE VACCINE BE HARMFUL TO UNBORN CHILDREN?**

It is not expected that the vaccine can cause any serious problems in pregnant women or their babies.

Other vaccines given during pregnancy, such as the influenza vaccine or whooping cough vaccine, do not cause more side effects in pregnant women or their babies. They do protect newborn babies from these diseases.

The COVID-19 vaccines have not yet been studied in pregnant women, though real-world data is starting to become available for babies who have been born after their mothers had the COVID-19 vaccine.

Multiple babies have now been born with COVID-19 antibodies because their mothers were vaccinated.

For more information, read the [Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy](#).

### **I AM IMMUNOCOMPROMISED. SHOULD I HAVE THE VACCINE?**

Immunocompromised people are being prioritised to receive a COVID-19 vaccine in Phase 1b of the roll out, as they are at increased risk of severe outcomes with COVID-19.

None of the COVID-19 vaccines that have been approved, or are currently being considered for approval, in Australia contain the live COVID-19 virus, which means they are safe for immunocompromised people.

Immunocompromised people should follow the advice from their doctor regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, including considering when to get the vaccine amongst any other treatments or medications.

### **WILL OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS OF IMMUNE-COMPROMISED CHILDREN BE INCLUDED IN A PRIORITY GROUP?**

In the first phase of the roll out, only those people who have been listed in the priority groups will receive the vaccine. The vaccine will be available to other people in later stages of the roll out.

### **IS IT SAFE TO RECEIVE THE COVID-19 VACCINE IF I'M UNDERGOING CANCER TREATMENT?**

Everyone currently receiving chemotherapy, immunotherapy, CAR-T-cell therapies, hormonal therapies or stem cell transplants can still receive the vaccine. However, it's a good idea to talk to your treating doctor about timing your vaccine with your other treatments.

People with active cancer or who are undergoing cancer treatment are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection and death when compared with the general population. People with active blood cancers are at especially high risk. This is why people with these cancers have been included in the priority groups in Phase 1b.

People who have haematological cancers diagnosed within the last 5 years (e.g. leukaemia, lymphoma or myelodysplastic syndrome) and people that have non-haematological cancer diagnosed in the last 12 months are eligible to be vaccinated in [Phase 1b of the rollout](#),

Read [more information](#) on getting vaccinated against COVID-19 while you have cancer.

### **I HAVE AN UNDERLYING MEDICAL CONDITION, WHEN WILL I BE VACCINATED?**

People with [underlying medical conditions](#) will be eligible to receive the vaccination in Phase 1b of the rollout.

For more information about whether your specific medical condition is included in this list, use the [Australian Government's Vaccine Eligibility Checker](#), call the National COVID-19 Vaccine Information Line on 1800 020 080 or read the [South Australian rollout plan](#).

### WHAT IS AN ELIGIBLE UNDERLYING MEDICAL CONDITION?

Eligible underlying medical conditions include:

- > Cancers and haematological diseases, currently or in the past.
- > Transplant recipients
- > Chronic inflammatory conditions
- > Immunodeficiency conditions
- > Chronic kidney, liver, lung or neurological conditions or diabetes
- > Severe obesity
- > Heart disease and blood pressure disorders
- > Severe mental health conditions.

For more information about whether your specific medical condition is included in this list, use the [Australian Government's Vaccine Eligibility Checker](#), call the National COVID-19 Vaccine Information Line on 1800 020 080 or read the [South Australian rollout plan](#).

### HOW CAN I PROVIDE EVIDENCE THAT I HAVE AN ELIGIBLE UNDERLYING MEDICAL CONDITION?

Examples of evidence can include:

- > Your regular GP clinic's records
- > A My Health Record
- > A referral from a treating GP or specialist
- > Other medical records including medical history printouts, a chronic disease care plan, a hospital discharge summary or a valid script for medication prescribed for one of the relevant conditions
- > An [Eligibility Declaration form](#).

Where no appropriate evidence is available, you can fill out the [Eligibility Declaration Form](#). More information is available in the [South Australian rollout plan](#).

### SHOULD I AVOID GETTING THE COVID-19 VACCINE IF I HAVE DERMAL FILLERS?

It is still safe to get the COVID-19 vaccine if you have dermal fillers.

Infrequently, people who have received dermal fillers might experience swelling at or near the site of filler injection (usually on the face or lips) after being vaccinated. Evidence suggests these reactions can be triggered by viral and bacterial illness, vaccinations such as the influenza or COVID-19 vaccine, and dental procedures.

The swelling appears to be temporary, may resolve without treatment, and responds well to medical treatment if necessary. Please contact your healthcare provider if you experience swelling at or near a dermal filler site following your vaccination.

### CAN CHILDREN GET THE VACCINE?

Clinical trials for new medicines do not typically include children as participants. Further clinical trials for other COVID-19 vaccines will include children.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) will continue to provide advice in relation to children. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) have currently approved the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for use in individuals aged 16 years and over, and the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine for use in individuals aged 50 years and over.

## **I'VE ALREADY HAD COVID-19. DO I NEED TO GET VACCINATED?**

You should be vaccinated regardless of whether you already had COVID-19 infection, due to the severe health risks and as reinfection with COVID-19 is possible. Experts do not yet know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. The natural immunity developed by people who have had COVID-19 varies.

As long as you are feeling well, and no longer have confirmed infection it is recommended to still receive COVID-19 vaccines.

There is no known disadvantage to having the COVID-19 vaccine when previously exposed or infected with COVID-19.

## **APPROVALS AND DECISIONS ABOUT VACCINES**

### **WHO DECIDES IF THE COVID-19 VACCINES ARE SAFE?**

The Australian community expects therapeutic goods in the marketplace to be safe, of high quality and of a standard at least equal to that of comparable countries.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is part of the Australian Government Department of Health, and is responsible for regulating therapeutic goods including prescription medicines, vaccines, sunscreens, vitamins and minerals, medical devices, blood and blood products.

The TGA is responsible for ensuring that therapeutic goods available for supply in Australia are safe and fit for their intended purpose. These include goods Australians rely on every day, such as vitamin tablets and sunscreens, through to goods used to treat serious conditions, such as prescription medicines, vaccines, blood products and surgical implants.

The TGA is assessing all COVID-19 vaccines being used, or proposed for use, in Australia. Vaccines are assessed based on how safe they are, and how effective they are. The TGA is responsible for continuing to monitor and enforce safety and efficacy of the vaccines after they approved.

If a problem is discovered, the TGA can take action. Possible regulatory actions vary from continued monitoring to withdrawing the product from the market.

### **WHO DECIDES WHO GETS THE VACCINES?**

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advises the Commonwealth government on immunisation and have been on the immunisation program for COVID-19 vaccines as they become available in Australia.

ATAGI helped develop the national rollout plan for the COVID-19 vaccines, and are continuing to provide robust clinical advice on issues such as the use of the COVID-19 vaccines in children, women who are pregnant, and older people.

ATAGI have developed the Australian Immunisation Handbook, which provides clinical guidelines for healthcare professionals and others about using vaccines safely and effectively.

An ATAGI COVID-19 Working Group has been formed to:

- > Provide technical advice to the Minister for Health on the immunisation program for COVID-19 vaccines as they become available in Australia.
- > Identify and prioritise gaps in the immunisation landscape to improve impact, confidence and equity with the use of COVID-19 vaccines.
- > Advise on the content of clinical and other communication materials, including updating the Australian Immunisation Handbook for any COVID-19 vaccines.

- > Consult with the Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) and the Advisory Committee on Vaccines (ACV) and other national committees on matters relating to the implementation of immunisation policies, procedures and vaccine safety related to COVID-19 vaccines.

### WHO IS MONITORING THE ROLLOUT?

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is responsible for monitoring the safety of all vaccines approved for use in Australia. TGA has put in place a comprehensive system to capture reports of adverse events following COVID-19 vaccination, through:

- > Australia's well-established [safety monitoring processes for vaccines](#)
- > Enhancements to vaccine safety monitoring as described in the [COVID-19 Vaccine Safety Monitoring Plan](#)
- > [Active surveillance](#) by SMS or email through AusVaxSafety

AusVaxSafety is a world-leading national vaccine safety system, coordinated by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

AusVaxSafety will be conducting comprehensive active safety monitoring of COVID-19 vaccines. This is to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines and provide clinician and consumer confidence in the vaccination program. AusVaxSafety will be following up with vaccine recipients three days and then eight days after each dose, and six weeks after the final dose.

## MORE INFORMATION

### WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

For information about the use of the COVID-19 vaccine in South Australia, visit [covidvaccine.sa.gov.au](https://covidvaccine.sa.gov.au).

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccines, visit the [Australian Government Department of Health](#) website, which also has a range of [translated information](#).

The National Coronavirus Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 1800 020 080.

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## For more information

**National Coronavirus Helpline 1800 020 080**  
[covidvaccine.sa.gov.au](https://covidvaccine.sa.gov.au)