

Fact sheet for staff

Consultation on the revised Policy: Addressing vaccine preventable disease: Occupational assessment, screening, and vaccination

Consultation on the revised 'Policy: Addressing vaccine preventable disease: Occupational assessment, screening, and vaccination' is open until 10 May 2024.

The Policy defines the minimum standards, including documented evidence of TB screening and immune status to selected VPDs. It is a mandatory requirement that all SA Health services implement the Policy in the workplace including ensuring necessary pre-employment processes are in place.

What are the proposed changes to the Policy?

The main proposed changes to the Policy include:

- > One dose of COVID-19 vaccination now strongly recommended for Category A and B roles (previously mandatory).
- > Health Care Workers (as defined in the Policy) in Category A or B roles who are not vaccinated against COVID-19, or who decide to not disclose their vaccination status, will be required to sign a 'Health Care Worker – COVID-19 Vaccine Refusal Form'.

Proposed changes to the Policy and related documents are shown in track changes.

Table: summary of changes


Section	Proposed Change	Rationale
2. Policy statement	Addition of statement about minimising the impact of contracting VPDs on workers and on the functioning of the healthcare system	Previous version did not cover the impact of the VPDs on the HCW or on the functioning of the healthcare system
11. Document history	Addition of changes made in consultation version	Ensure document history table reflects the changes in the current version
Mandatory Instruction 1: table 1	Change of COVID-19 vaccine from mandatory for category A and B to strongly recommended	There is near universal immunity to COVID-19 related to high vaccination rates, past infection, or both, with hybrid immunity (combination of infection and vaccination) providing the highest level of protection.
Mandatory Instruction 2: section 1.1 current employees	Addition of the reference to employee's choice not to disclose vaccination status	Recognised that current employees have a choice not to disclose vaccination status to their employer
Mandatory Instruction 2: section 1.1 students	Change name of required form to HCW vaccine refusal form (i.e. removal of 'student')	A single form will cover all HCW (as defined in the Policy) including students



Mandatory Instruction 2: section 1.2	Addition of a section regarding HCW who decline to be vaccinated against COVID-19	HCW are now able to decline to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and this section includes the management of these HCW
Mandatory Instruction 2: section 3	Removal of section on COVID-19 vaccine medical contraindications	As COVID-19 vaccine is strongly recommended rather than mandated, this section is no longer required
Mandatory Instruction 3: table 2	COVID-19 acceptable evidence of immunity changed to one COVID-19 vaccine	There is emerging evidence that one dose of COVID-19 vaccine in an individual who has had a past infection with COVID-19 may provide equivalent protection to two primary doses of COVID-19 vaccine in an infection naïve individual. The vast majority of people in Australia have experienced at least one COVID-19 infection
Mandatory Instruction 4: table 3	COVID-19 vaccine/immune status requirements changed to one COVID-19 vaccine	There is emerging evidence that one dose of COVID-19 vaccine in an individual who has had a past infection with COVID-19 may provide equivalent protection to two primary doses of COVID-19 vaccine in an infection naïve individual. The vast majority of people in Australia have experienced at least one COVID-19 infection
Mandatory Instruction 6: table 5	Addition of the requirement for reporting on Policy compliance of employees in Category A and B	This will enable the CPHO to monitor compliance with the Policy, as this was lacking in earlier versions of the Policy
Throughout	Repairing broken links	Ensure access to relevant links
Health Care Worker (HCW) Vaccination Refusal Form	Removal of COVID-19 vaccination from this form Clarification of a HCW, and that completion of the form is in accordance with Mandatory Instruction 2. Inclusion of HCWs who decline to disclose their vaccination status	Amending the Form in line with proposed Policy changes, and providing further clarification A separate form for COVID-19 vaccine refusal will now be used (see below)
Health Care Worker – COVID-19 Vaccine Refusal Form	Creation of a new form in accordance with proposed Mandatory Instruction 2, section 1.2	In line with proposed policy changes

Why does SA Health have an immunisation policy?

Health care workers (HCW) have an increased risk of acquiring some vaccine preventable diseases (including COVID-19) and of transmitting these diseases to other HCWs, patients/clients, and visitors in SA Health services. In addition to individual impacts on staff and patients/clients, this can have a significant impact on the functioning of the healthcare system as a whole.



SA Health has a duty of care and a responsibility under the [Work Health and Safety Act 2012](#) to minimise the transmission of vaccine preventable diseases (VPD) in the workplace.

The [‘Addressing vaccine preventable disease: Occupational assessment, screening, and vaccination’](#) Policy defines the minimum standards, including documented evidence of TB screening and immune status to selected VPDs. It is a mandatory requirement that all SA Health services implement the Policy in the workplace including ensuring necessary pre-employment processes are in place.

Who does the Policy apply to?

The Policy applies to all Health Care Workers (as defined in the policy) including, current and prospective employees, contractors, students and volunteers of the Department for Health and Wellbeing, Local Health Networks (including state-wide services aligned with those networks) and SA Ambulance Service.

Why is the COVID-19 Vaccination no longer mandatory for Category A and B roles?

Version 3.0 of the SA Health policy ‘Addressing vaccine preventable disease: Occupational assessment, screening, and vaccination’ included the requirement for health care workers in Category A and B to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in accordance with Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation recommendations.

Since the release of Version 3, levels of population immunity to COVID-19 have increased such that in Australia there is now near universal immunity to SARS-CoV-2 due to vaccination, past infection or a combination of both.

Evidence shows that hybrid immunity (i.e. having been vaccinated and having experienced a COVID-19 infection) provides the highest level of protection against COVID-19 related severe disease, hospitalisation, COVID-19 related death and long-COVID.

Given the above, SA Health is considering different options to mandatory vaccination to protect staff and health services against the impact of COVID-19.

SA Health is looking to replace mandatory vaccination for staff with a new requirement for staff refusing COVID-19 vaccination to actively sign the Health Care Worker – COVID-19 Refusal Form acknowledging the benefit of vaccination.

In addition, emerging evidence suggests a single dose of COVID-19 in an individual with past infection may provide similar protection to two doses of COVID-19 vaccine in an infection naïve person. Consequently, a single dose of COVID-19 vaccine will now be considered acceptable evidence of immunity, consistent with national recommendations for a primary course of COVID-19 vaccination.

What does it mean for existing HCWs within SA Health?

For Category A and Category B roles, if a HCW has documented evidence of having received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, there is no change.

If a current or new HCW in Category A and Category B roles decides to not receive a COVID-19 vaccination as strongly recommended in the Policy, or to disclose their vaccination status, they must sign the ‘Health Care Worker – COVID-19 Vaccine Refusal Form.’



What does it mean for new employees of SA Health?

Recruitment for new employees can not be progressed unless compliance with the Policy and completion of the 'Health Care Worker – COVID-19 Vaccine Refusal Declaration Form (if necessary) has occurred.

What is the purpose of the proposed Health Care Worker – COVID-19 Vaccination Refusal Form?

The purpose of this form is for the Health Care Worker to acknowledge that:

- > SA Health has a duty of care and a responsibility under the Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA) to minimise the transmission and impact of vaccine preventable disease in the workplace, and
- > That vaccination continues to provide superior protection against COVID-19 related severe disease, hospitalisation, death and long-COVID, and
- > that in working in a health care setting they are at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19 than in community settings, and
- > they may be required to comply with other infection control risk mitigation strategies (such as PPE).

When will the proposed Policy changes apply?

The proposed Policy and related documents are currently in the consultation phase. This means that DHW is currently seeking feedback on the proposed Policy changes. Once feedback has been considered, a final decision will be made by the Chief Executive and the final policy will be provided to staff.

Will unvaccinated staff be required to wear PPE?

Under current workforce health and safety legislation – [Work Health and Safety Regulations, 2012 \(SA\)](#), it is the responsibility of each healthcare worker to be familiar with and comply with these protective measures at all times when there is an identified risk of exposure.

Work related exposures to an infection risk should be managed in accordance with the SA Health [Prevention and Responding to Work Related Exposure to Infectious Diseases Policy Guideline \(PDF 672KB\)](#).

How can I provide feedback on the proposed changes?

The draft Policy is open for Health Care Workers as defined in the policy to provide feedback until Friday 10 May 2024.

Visit the [Policy consultation webpage](#) to complete the survey or email: Health:DHWorkforceServicesPolicyFeedback@sa.gov.au

This information is a tool to assist with the management of workforce related matters and does not override the legally enforceable entitlements contained within the applicable industrial instruments.



For more information

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of South Australia**

SA Health