

Maintaining immunisation services during COVID-19

SA Health has developed the following recommendations as a guide for immunisation providers to support the ongoing delivery of National and State Immunisation Programs.

Key points

- > Immunisation service delivery is an essential service and it is vital that vaccinations continue being provided to the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- > Service providers should continue to maintain immunisation program delivery by incorporating the latest [Commonwealth](#) and [State](#) Government COVID-19 recommendations, including the use of masks in health care services.
- > Robust hand-hygiene, clinic cleaning and disinfection are key to preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- > Providers should ensure that social/physical distancing is maintained in all areas of their clinic.
- > Vaccination appointment times should be staggered to avoid crowding in clinic areas.
- > If walk-in clinics for immunisation services are provided, then adequate social/physical distancing measures must be implemented during periods of peak attendance.
- > Staff and clients with symptoms of a respiratory infection should not attend the clinic.
- > Additional precautions should be undertaken for medically vulnerable clients.

Recommendations for venues

- > Display signage at entrances of community clinics, outlining the following:
Due to the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, < *insert your organisation name here* > is taking measures to protect the community. It is vital that all instructions are followed.
- > Ensure there is 1.5 metre spacing for patients in queues and for seating arrangements in waiting, reception and clinic areas.
- > Consider the option to hold clinics in larger areas to observe social/physical distancing.
- > If a large number of people are attending the clinic, consider options to assist with crowd control and designate a staff member to monitor flow of individuals lining up when first presenting, and those waiting pre and post vaccination.
- > Where possible, have separate areas or walk-through options. For example, people enter in one door and exit out another.
- > Encourage hand washing or using hand sanitiser provided before entering and exiting the premises.
- > Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces regularly, such as door and cupboard handles, lift buttons, phones, light switches, keyboards etc. Further information is available at: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019
- > Consider asking family members to wait in their car until their allocated appointment time, or until they are contacted by your service.

Recommendations for immunisation clinics

- > Allow additional clinic time for planning and implementing the procedures needed to protect all individuals against the transmission of COVID-19.
- > Try to avoid large numbers of people attending at any one time. Consider allocating appointment times rather than drop-in clinics.
- > Patients with appointments should be reminded to arrive on time and not in advance of their appointment to minimise the number of people in the waiting area.
- > To prevent long wait times, stagger appointments to ensure there is sufficient time between patients.
- > Limit the number of people entering the immunisation area to one child and one parent legal/guardian where possible and if it is safe to do so.
- > People must not attend the clinic if they have any symptoms of a respiratory infection (see current updates for the latest directions).
- > Consider sending SMS reminders to upcoming patients instructing them not to attend if they are feeling unwell or have any symptoms of a respiratory infection.
- > In the clinical area, ensure surface areas and 'high touch/high traffic' areas, such as bench tops, cupboard and door handles, phones and keyboards are frequently cleaned and disinfected as per COVID-19 recommendations. Further information is available at: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019
- > Clean hands thoroughly with soap, running water and paper towels or recommended alcohol-based hand sanitisers. Ensure this occurs frequently, particularly between clients.
- > Display posters demonstrating proper hand washing technique in handwashing areas.
- > Avoid the use of shared toys, books and other equipment that children may use.
- > Use a single-use pre-immunisation checklist for each client. Avoid laminated/multi-use checklists.
- > Avoid sharing pens or stationery where possible. Immunisation providers should keep a pen for their personal use and wipe down any shared stationary between individuals.
- > Within the immunisation area, observe social/physical distancing as much as practical before the vaccine(s) are administered.
- > Within general practice, consider running specified 'immunisation only' appointment blocks throughout the week to ensure that only patients who are well are in the clinic during these times.
- > Ensure that clinic webpages, telephone messages, and venue signage is updated regularly with COVID-19 information to ensure clients are aware of the expectations and changes that have been made to the service.
- > If clinics/appointments need to be cancelled, include information on alternative arrangements, or expected time of service re-instatement.
- > Consider the use of SMS and social media to assist in updating community information.

School Immunisation Program

The South Australian Department for Education (DE) have information and processes in place to help control the spread of COVID-19. In collaboration with SA Health, strategies are in place to manage and support ongoing delivery of School Immunisation Program (SIP) visits in the event of partial or total school closures.

SIP providers will be informed of any decisions that will impact the delivery of the SIP.

In addition to the recommendations for Immunisation Clinics, the following recommendations are to be incorporated by SIP Providers into the delivery of the SIP:

- > Ask schools to inform you as soon as possible if there are any COVID-19 cases at the school, and whether a school closure has been implemented.
- > Request open well-ventilated spaces for nurses and administrative staff to work in that don't compromise student privacy.
- > Ensure the furniture, environment and equipment in the school immunisation areas have been regularly cleaned as per the latest COVID-19 recommendations.
- > Encourage students and staff to wash/sanitise their hands prior to presenting for immunisation (promote the use of hand sanitisers in the area).
- > Request that school waiting areas have social/physical distancing strategies in place.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- > It is mandatory for all patients (including students) and staff attending health care services to wear a mask, unless they meet specific exemption criteria. See the [SA Health](#) website for more information.
- > PPE is generally only necessary for health care workers seeing patients with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, and where there is a much higher risk of transmission. Patients displaying symptoms should not be presenting for vaccination.
- > More advice on PPE can be found on the SA Health's COVID 19 website and the Commonwealth website.

Post vaccination waiting times/areas

- > It is recommended that patients remain in a seated area for 15 minutes after their vaccination.
- > Consider having larger waiting areas with seats that are spaced to ensure social/physical distancing measures are adhered to.

Staff

- > All staff must be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 as per the [Emergency Management \(Healthcare Setting Workers Vaccination\) \(COVID-19\) Direction 2022](#).
- > Staff must not attend clinics if they are unwell.
- > Any staff with fever ($\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$), or history of fever, OR acute respiratory infection (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, altered taste or smell) must not attend work until they have been assessed.
- > Staff meeting testing criteria should be assessed and tested for COVID-19 and remain in self-isolation until they receive their negative test results.
- > If any staff member is a confirmed case, then they must not return to work until they meet the clearance criteria. Check the www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID-19 for the latest information.
- > If there are staff shortages, providers will need to implement their Business Continuity Plan to determine if immunisation services can be safely undertaken.

OFFICIAL

Medically vulnerable clients

During influenza season an increase in medically vulnerable clients seeking immunisation services at general practice is anticipated. Precautions should be taken to ensure that these clients are not exposed to increased risk of COVID-19.

This additional advice is particularly important for clients who are 65 years of age or older, identify as Aboriginal, or have underlying health conditions.

- > Vulnerable clients should be booked earlier in the day where possible and should not be required to wait in common areas for prolonged periods.
- > Where possible, vaccinations should be given at the same time as other services to avoid unnecessary repeat visits.
- > Consider other vaccination venues, such as home visits, if possible.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, prevention of other respiratory diseases is essential. Annual influenza vaccination is highly recommended for all individuals and is a requirement within Residential Aged Care Facilities.

Alternative models for service delivery

SA Health understands that during challenging circumstances many clinics have explored innovative solutions for service delivery.

Organisations that choose to use alternative models of service delivery must ensure that the minimum standards for immunisation service delivery are adhered to in order to ensure a safe and effective service.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- > Adequate pre-vaccination assessment and screening.
- > Preparation for the vaccination procedure, such as the ability to correctly identify and easily access the vaccination site.
- > The ability to provide post vaccination care, including monitoring the patient for 15 minutes and treating any possible Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) adequately.
- > Documentation and reporting to the Australian Immunisation Register of all vaccinations administered.

Regularly updated information

- > SA Health www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID-19
- > South Australian Government www.covid-19.sa.gov.au
- > Department of Health, Australian Government www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-nc

Acknowledgements

SA Health would like to acknowledge the below organisations in the development of this resource:

- > Western Australian Government, Department of Health, Public and Aboriginal Health Division, Communicable Disease Control Directorate, Immunisation Provider Update – COVID 19 Maintaining Immunisation Services, 25 March 2020.
- > State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, March 2020. Victorian Local Government Community Immunisation Services-Coronavirus (COVID-19) update.
- > COVID-19 Community Notice to Schools; Eastern Health Authority
- > Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI): Guiding Principles for maintaining Immunisation Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

For more information

Immunisation Section
Communicable Disease Control
Branch Telephone: 1300 232 272
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019

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Last Updated 03 February 2022



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